The Nation.

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FALL BOOKS

TED SOLOTAROFF ON JOHN CHEEVER

RICHARD R. LINGEMAN ON JIMMY BRESLIN

PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS ON STEPHEN CARTER AND GERTRUDE EZORSKY

DAVID KAUFMAN ON NORMAN RUSH

RUTH SIDEL ON JONATHAN KOZOL

JOHN LEONARD ON NORMAN MAILER

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LETTERS

and Jon Wiener say in "Fighting ...est," their review of the Smithsonian ...bit "Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920" [July 29/Aug. 5], the wall texts take note of what is *not* in the paintings. As a strategy for understanding art, that has limits that the curators withhold from the viewers. Because the same exhibit could have been mounted with traditional texts, it differs considerably from others that Foner and Wiener compare it with: the Chicago Historical Society's exhibit on slavery and racism or that of Richmond's Valentine Museum on Jim Crow. Those museums chose new subjects: artifacts that can be explained for what they are, not for what they are not—probably why, at the Smithsonian, there is so much hectoring (which Foner and Wiener describe simply as "didactic"). The curators seem caught in an intellectual bind. On the one hand, the accompanying text is deconstructionist—there is no "history," it is only what we make of it; and on the other, there is a history, and it's a shameful one. Perhaps that dilemma is what makes the show so disturbing. *Charles A. Miller*

'HOLIER THAN THOU'

Oxford, Miss.

I enjoyed the pictures but disliked the captions at the Smithsonian exhibit. Eric Foner and Jon Wiener seem to think this makes me a racist, a Republican or a sentimentalist afraid of the historical truth. I like to think I can face the truth; no book of history has moved me more than *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. The captions on the paintings are objectionable not because they are too radical and hard-hitting but because their tone is smug and holier-than-thou and because they go out of their way to ascribe bad ulterior motives. Sometimes, as with Frederic Remington's *Fight for the Water Hole*, there is justification. But consider William Fuller's *Crow Creek Agency, Dakota Territory*. No doubt there is wishful thinking in this charming picture. But is "the neat and prosperous order of the white colored buildings, in contrast to the random arrangement of the teepees," proof that Fuller wants to disparage the Indians? If the teepees really *were* randomly arranged, what can we infer from the mere recording of the fact? If they weren't, what is the evidence that they weren't?

It's fair enough to use art and history to illuminate each other, but the authors of those captions know beforehand what they will see. Their supposed demystification of the West cheapens and trivializes history, denies *any* heroic element in the whole saga and encourages people to look down complacently on the past. In the 1970s I heard someone ask I.F. Stone how he could possibly quote the slaveholder Thomas Jefferson on any subject. Stone replied that history is tragedy, not melodrama. What I miss in the exhibit is any sense of the tragedy and complexity of the American past. *Peter Wirth*

'ARROGANT' ECOFEMINISTS

Burlington, Vt.

We live in an age of increasing mysticism, regression and personal withdrawal from the public sphere. In reviewing a new ecofeminist anthology along with my critique, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* ["Rethinking the World," Sept. 23], Jan Clausen had an opportunity to lift some veils of obfuscation and help me challenge the regressive woman-nature associations promoted by ecofeminism. Regrettably, she didn't do this. Although she finds little of substance wrong with my book, she calls me "sly" and "abusive." To defend ecofeminism's "theoretical potential," she cites authors whose work perpetuates "women=nature connections"—through religious belief or through "conscious choice"—as ifa theorist's acknowledgment that such "connections" are "socially constructed" defused their regressive potential in a movement organized around them.

It's a common ecofeminist claim that life is "an interconnected web," "interdependent," even "sacred." When I assert that the logic of this would oppose women's right to an abortion, Clausen says I've pulled a "sneaky tactic." The question remains how ecofeminists—not famous for their coherence—would refute the claim of Feminists for Life: "Feminism is, properly, part of a larger philosophy that values all life. True feminist thinking recognizes the interdependence of all living things. . . . Abortion is incompatible with this feminist vision."

Clausen implies that rejecting ecofeminism requires "discounting" the work of non-ecofeminists like Evelyn Fox Keller. This is arrogance—their work does not stand or fall with ecofeminism, and the boundaries they maintain with it should be respected rather than blurred. It's equally arrogant for ecofeminists to often include every female ecology and peace activist in ecofeminism's "record of activism." The Chipko movement in India was primarily a peasant movement, not an ecofeminist one, according to sociologist Ramachandra Guha. The women who opposed the L.A. incinerator in 1986 evolved a "class analysis"—not an ecofeminist one—according to organizer Cynthia Hamilton. The much-touted Women's Pentagon Action occurred more than a decade ago; the striking absence of specifically ecofeminist "activism" now is an issue even among ecofeminists. Those bothered by these trends would be wise to read my book rather than rely on Clausen's view of it. *Janet Biehl*

CLAUSEN REPLIES

Brooklyn, N.Y.

Janet Biehl's use of the formula "women=nature connections" (which did not appear in my review) is misleading in contexts where the implications of her shorthand cannot be fully explored. Biehl conjures up a vision of ecofeminists wallowing in romantic mythology. Some do; they get short shrift from me. What I take to be the potential of ecofeminist theory lies in its insight that gender hierarchies are deeply embedded in Western ideology about nature as well as in women's and men's material relationships to the nonhuman world. As with other social critiques, what one does with this basic understanding is in no way foreordained as either regressive or progressive. Truly radical ecofeminism attempts to use an analysis of how gendered relationships to nature have been constructed and lived to suggest how these relationships could be profoundly transformed.

Biehl is quite right that it's incorrect to subsume under the ecofeminist banner every thinker or activist whose work in some way draws on gender/nature issues. In *Engendering the Environment Debate: Lessons from the Indian Subcontinent*, for instance, economist Bina Agarwal writes as a "feminist environmentalist," objecting to what she feels is ecofeminism's focus on gender/nature *ideology* at the expense of material factors. But like the other thinkers I cited whose work lies outside the purview of ecofeminism, Agarwal positions herself on a continuum of research and reflection about the relationship between gender and the conditions of human survival on earth. Biehl's attempt to make an end run around this critical issue constitutes her book's most disappointing flaw.

I still don't grasp the logic of connecting ecofeminism with an antiabortion stance. Where is it written that life begins at conception? Even the Catholic Church long held otherwise. *Jan Clausen*

JUST SO STORY?

Willowbrook, Ill.

Your editorial "Gatesgate" [Aug. 12/19] unduly credits Orson Welles for the story of the frog and the scorpion. My great-grandmother, who died at 102 in 1952, told us the story when we were little tots growing up in a remote village in India. She was illiterate and, trust me, she never heard of Orson Welles. (I am sure Welles never heard of my great-grandmother either.) She heard the story from her mother, and her mother from her mother and so on ad infinitum. It is from ancient Indian folklore, and every Indian child knows it. (Today, the foolish frogs from the Third World are carrying the treacherous scorpions from the First World, and are being stung every minute of every day.)
V.R. Veluri

We didn't say Orson Welles invented the well-known story, just that he told it (in a monologue in the film Mr. Arkadin).
—The Editors

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CONTENTS.

Volume 253, Number 17

LETTERS
610

EDITORIALS
611 Political Correction
612 "Super-Biopoly" *Richard Pollak*
612 Will Power *Garrett Epps*

COLUMNS
613 The Art of Conversation *Calvin Trillin*
614 Minority Report *Christopher Hitchens*
615 Reading Around *Elizabeth Pochoda*

Cover design by Louise Fili

BOOKS & THE ARTS
616 Gottlieb, ed.: The Journals of John Cheever *Ted Solotaroff*
620 Kozol: Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools *Ruth Sidel*
622 Mailer: Harlot's Ghost *John Leonard*
630 The Coalition (poem) *Donald Hall*
632 Ezorsky: Racism and Justice: The Case for Affirmative Action
Carter: Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby *Patricia J. Williams*
638 Rush: Mating *David Kaufman*
644 Breslin: Damon Runyon: A Life *Richard Lingeman*

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EDITORIALS.

Political Correction

It is a measure of how degraded the national civil rights struggle has become that all the efforts expended in the past two years have produced a minor piece of legislation that regains only a portion of the ground won twenty years ago and then lost to a regressive Supreme Court. Even so, President Bush had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the Oval Office to sign off on a compromise almost identical to the bill he vetoed last year. It will be ages before dazed and debilitated liberals in Congress can be reinvigorated to mount another civil rights campaign.

At the end, it was probably David Duke's fortuitous victory, as a Republican, in the Louisiana primary that caused Bush to agree to a compromise on the "correction" act. (It corrects the Court's misreading of previous laws allowing complainants to charge racial and sexual discrimination if a pattern of exclusion can be found.) Duke has successfully co-opted the Republicans' race card and made it his own, leaving the Bush re-election campaign vulnerable to charges of guilt by party association. Politicians and political commentators who winked, or quietly winced, when Bush used "quotas," "affirmative action" and "welfare" as code words in his appeal to working-class, ethnic and Southern whites, go into conniptions when they hear Duke say similar things. Within a weekend, the conventional wisdom had it that on race, at least, Duke was merely Bush with a chin implant and a facial peel.

But Duke can move Bush only so far away from the "Southern strategy" in its contemporary form. The committee to re-elect the President, now in formation, will need a cause around which to organize its campaign, and there are few available alternatives to the Republicans' trusty defense of white (white male, that is) privilege. Foreign policy isn't playing so well since the lights went up in the Persian Gulf theater, the economy is poised to double-dip into recession (if it ever

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recovered at all), abortion is a loser in all but the most fundamentalist precincts and communism, as we know, is defunct. What's left? Watch out for the return of Willie Horton.

'Super-Biopoly'

Back in the 1970s, when something called the "wired nation" was aborning, ringing rhetoric promised it would interconnect the populace and create a brave new era of democratic communications, with public access and diversity for all. The media giants, of course, had other ideas for this nifty new thing called cable television, and it soon became a conglomeratized conduit of corporate infotainment that, like the commercial networks, serves chiefly to narcotize viewers and sell products.

Now, here we go again. On October 7, a federal appeals court gave the seven Baby Bells, all telephone monopolies in their respective regions, permission to begin providing information services over their lines. Next came a unanimous decision by the Federal Communications Commission to allow these telephone monoliths to transmit TV signals and package programs as well. All this is made possible by fiber-optic cable—thin, transparent strands of glass capable of carrying 300 or more channels of data, voice communication *and* video, a quantum leap from coaxial-cable TV, which is limited to some fifty cable channels.

Predictably, this new technology is getting the same ruffles and flourishes cable did. Conservative author George Gilder, for one, assures us that fiber optics combined with ever smaller microchips will provide a new communications system "that can transform the possibilities of all human society," giving viewers an "unlimited" number of programming choices, which will "enrich and strengthen democracy and capitalism all around the world." Capitalism, certainly. Soon after the appeals court go-ahead, Ronald Stowe, who helps coordinate the Baby Bells' joint clout in Washington, began tap-dancing right to the bank. "It's time for us to talk about business ventures," he told *The Wall Street Journal.*

These include providing—instead of just carrying—such information as stock quotations, sports scores and other news, as well as electronic Yellow Pages and classified advertising on the home screen, all at the push of a phone button. Under the F.C.C. ruling the Baby Bells would also be permitted to offer a so-called video dial tone; initially it would only activate a pipeline for programs produced by other companies, but eventually it could carry home-grown fare.

These developments have left newspaper and cable executives howling about unfair competition, the suggestion being that significant competition now actually exists within those cozy industries. They vow court fights and fierce lobbying to stop the powerful Baby Bells from horning in on their profitable oligopolies. These tactics may cause a certain delay, but given the Reagan/Bush affection for the big players in the media marketplace, telco TV programming is likely to meet little opposition from politicians inside the Beltway. Thus, as Ralph Nader has pointed out, the present cable cabal, for all its bleating about the Baby Bell threat, is likely to end up on the same phone line as part of a new "super-biopoly."

Meanwhile, the Senate ponders a bill "reforming" the cable industry by relying on the Reagan/Bush–stacked F.C.C. to implement regulatory policies. This is an F.C.C. that tried to abolish limits on commercials on children's programming, that is considering letting the telcos operate without paying the franchise fees that now underwrite local public-access channels and that looks favorably on lifting the ceiling that prevents a conglomerate from owning more than twelve television and twenty-four radio stations.

Nader and his Teledemocracy Project excepted, most of the public interest community has been standing on the sidelines with no national media policy to put forward at this critical moment. Without one—one that at minimum guarantees free access for public, government and educational use—fiber optics will bring a cable TV rerun, multiplied by three hundred.

RICHARD POLLAK

Will Power

"*The Times*," Walter Bagehot wrote in 1867, "has made many ministries." This quotation causes my article to begin with a spurious air of erudition but bears only minimal relation to my subject: Why shouldn't there be term limits for political columnists?

Washington Post columnist George Will has decided that there should be a limit on the number of terms members of Congress can serve. Will's change of heart—originally he opposed term limits, arguing that "all great careers are long"—has been covered by his colleagues as if Will were a powerful member of Congress or the executive branch. The treatment of Will's shift suggests that he and his fellow pundits have amassed too much political power. Column limits are the answer.

Speaking on ABC's *This Week With David Brinkley*, Will argued that term limits would weaken special interests. He admitted that they also would restrict democracy, but too bad: The Constitution contains many limits on democracy. Will also said that term limits would make politicians learn about the real world. His friend George McGovern, for example, defeated for re-election to the Senate, tried to run an inn and learned that excessive paperwork is bad. And, finally, Will said, "There is something wrong with the fact that the year 2002, it is virtually certain, will be the forty-eighth consecutive year of control of the House of Representatives by one party."

That party is the Democratic Party, which Will loathes. However, he insists, "You have to take my word for it, if the Republicans ran everything, I'd be for throwing them out." But Republicans *do* run virtually everything and probably will in the year 2002. Democrats have held the Senate only five years; the G.O.P. has had the White House for eleven. Will is not uncomfortable with Republican domination of the Supreme Court or executive branch; only with the Democratic Congress.

Will's arguments cut equally strongly in favor of a law that

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would have retired him in the mid-1980s. Talk about special interests: Will cozied up to Reagan, worked covertly on his campaign and kept his mouth shut about the theft of President Carter's debate briefing book. We hear ad nauseam about his lunch with Nancy Reagan, his friendship with Jack Kemp, his high regard for Sam Nunn, and so on.

Newspaper readers may want to read this drivel, but too bad: There should be limits on democracy. Barred from his column and TV commentator slot, Will might have to get a real job and come up—at long last—with new ideas. There is something wrong with the thought that, in the year 2002, the same bylines will likely be dominating the opinion pages of the nation's major newspapers. (Think of the *New York Times* Op-Ed page, more stable—and grayer—than Brezhnev's Politburo.)

Is there anybody besides me who finds this man's cultural ubiquity wearisome? Over morning coffee, open the *Post*: There is Will, quoting essays by Edmund Burke that neither you nor he will ever read. At the dentist's office, open *Newsweek*: There is Will, holding forth about de Tocqueville and Walter Pater. Turn on the TV: There are those chubby cheeks and that smug, glassy glare, hurling Hamiltonian polysyllables at David Brinkley. Even the ballpark, once a sure refuge from dweebs in bow ties, has now become an outpost of Will Inc.

Of course, Will's defenders will argue that column limits violate the First Amendment. Sure they do; but Congressional term limits violate the Constitution too. The requirements for a Congressional seat are set out in Article I, section 2, clause 2 (House) and section 3, clause 2 (Senate), and term limits are not mentioned therein. Hamilton, in Federalist Number 60, noted that "the qualifications of the persons who may . . . be chosen [to serve in Congress] . . . are defined and fixed in the Constitution, and are unalterable by the legislature." The Supreme Court held in *Powell v. McCormack* that the qualifications listed in the Constitution may not be changed by vote of Congress. Even the Republican Party, back when it understood that America had a Constitution, recognized this. In 1947, when the G.O.P.-led 80th Congress sought to insure that there could never be another F.D.R., it passed the Twenty-second Amendment and submitted it to the states for ratification.

So Congressional term limits must be enacted by constitutional amendment. And if we are to have one self-serving, partisan, result-driven amendment, why not two? I propose amending the First Amendment to read, "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of . . . the press, *save that no journalist may write a political column for more than twelve years, or appear on TV in a bow tie, or quote Walter Bagehot more than once a month.*" It may do violence to our system of government, but so what? Why should I be more responsible, and less simple-minded, than the advocates of term limits are?

As Oliver Cromwell said, "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!" Does that pretentious quotation win your support for my proposal, George? Or do the arguments seem less cogent when it is your ox that will be gored?

GARRETT EPPS

Garrett Epps, a novelist and former staff writer for The Washington Post, *was a columnist for* The Independent *in Durham, North Carolina, before entering Duke Law School. George Will was the speaker at his graduation last spring.*

SCARLETT FEVER

The huge success of *Scarlett*, Alexandra Ripley's sequel to *Gone With the Wind*, opens the way for endless sequelae. Some suggestions:

For Whom the Belle Toils. Scarlett's plucky granddaughter as a nurse during the Spanish Civil War.

Tara! Tara! Tara! Scarlett's plucky great-granddaughter manages a Hawaiian pineapple plantation on the eve of World War II (sequel to World War I).

Bonfire of the Mammies. Scarlett's plucky great-great-granddaughter, who made a fortune in Atlanta's go-go real estate boom, finds her upscale life style shattered when she runs over Mammy's great-great-great-granddaughter on an exit ramp.

Scarlett's Ghost. Scarlett's plucky, but devious, great-great-great granddaughter as a C.I.A. agent.

As Scarlett III says in *Belle*, "After all, the day after tomorrow is another day, too."

HENRY BEARD AND CHRISTOPHER CERF

Henry Beard and Christopher Cerf are co-authors, with Sarah Durkee and Sean Kelly, of The Book of Sequels.

★ THE ART OF CONVERSATION

Oh, once we talked of many things.
We talked of movies, plays and books.
We argued politics all night.
We graded pols as knaves or shnooks.
We talked of baseball, food and wine,
Discussed if acupuncture hurts.
Our conversations measured all:
Say, breadth of vision, length of skirts.
We planned the future of the world.
To shut us up you'd have to bomb us.
And now we talk of just two things:
Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas.

Calvin Trillin

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Majdal Shams, Golan

People have been known to go to war for the word-association of a place name. Alsace-Lorraine ("Always think of it, never speak of it"), Trieste, Mafeking, Danzig . . . remember the Alamo? In the Near East, Arabs react with passion and bitterness to the mention of a town of which most Americans have never heard. The city of Quneitra was the capital of the Quneitra Province of Syria until it was captured by Israel in 1967, and before the Israelis handed it back, under the terms of a "disengagement" agreement in 1973, they razed it with bulldozers and explosives. It remains a place of pilgrimage and atonement for Syrian nationalists, and is kept as a monument to the shame of 1967. Schoolchildren and reporters get trucked there. Since Hafez al-Assad was Minister of Defense at the time the city was lost, he is believed to take it personally. But he's not the only one. Quneitra Province is known to buffs and professionals and to the wider public as the Golan, which through no fault of its own possesses some mountainous relief and thus has "heights." It was not part of the Palestine Mandate and was never featured on Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky's ambitious maps of a Greater Israel (maps that were drawn up long before the "security" justification for them was invented). Nonetheless, in the imagery of the conflict, few names have more totemic flavor than "the Golan Heights."

You approach these rather undramatic hills by way of a village named Khushniya, where Israeli tour buses can show visitors a bullet-scarred mosque and conjure the *frisson* of a battle site. The utter desolation of the place is suggestive, but not as much as Quneitra itself, which is visible through binoculars and always conveys a thrill. See how intransigent the Syrians are; they keep the place devastated and empty. It's just like those mysterious Palestinian "refugee" camps. Well, time to go back to the hotel. We can't plumb the depths of the Arab mind today.

If you want to see real intransigence, however, you don't have to cross into Syria. Merely continue up the winding Golan road until you come to the pretty town of Majdal Shams. Here the Israeli flag flies from every bit of high ground. Every citizen is a Druse, and all citizens regard themselves as adamantly Syrian, and if you choose not to believe me, you must visit the Tal Asorakh, or "Hill of Shouts." The border that divides the Golan Druse from their former neighbors and current relatives runs through a deep ravine outside Majdal Shams. Once a week or so, people gather there with megaphones and yell news of family and friends across the crevasse. They neither welcome nor particularly mind the presence of visitors and strangers who watch this familiar routine. On the day that I chose to turn up, the "talk" was of a death in the family, with kinsmen needing to be informed by megaphone.

As usual in this region, any resentment felt at such an indignity is concealed from the guest. At tea with the mullah of the town, I was asked only to note that the people don't wish to be called Druse, even though that is their religion, and don't wish to be confused with the Palestinians. "We are part of the Arab nation, and we are part of Syria. Of course we sympathize with the Palestinian *intifada*, and we send food and medicine when we are permitted. But we are Syrians." Golani intransigence has taken the form of a passive resistance—a refusal to accept Israeli identity cards after the abrupt annexation of the region in 1981, a refusal to recognize the occupier's law and a repudiation of the settlements, which are mainly Labor and Mapam kibbutzim rather than right-wing zealot condominiums. Jewish religious fanatics prefer the divinely mandated Judea and Samaria to this unpromising hillscape.

Awkwardness arose when I asked about Desert Storm, in which the mighty Assad contended against the lion of Baghdad. But like the Palestinians, the Golani are engaged in yet another of their enforced re-thinks about Arab regimes and Arab protectors. The statement, often made, that anything is better than occupation doesn't mean that anything is to be welcomed. (Of course, almost everybody in the world was wrong about Saddam Hussein at one time or another. It is only those living under Israeli rule who are told that they can't be allowed a mistake, and can forfeit their right of self-determination for having made a rash bet.)

I went across the town to meet the Golan Academic Association, a group of local researchers born out of the long and stubborn general strike that greeted the Israeli annexation. A spokesman, Salman Fakruddin, gave me several persuasive reasons to think that this bizarre sub-occupation might be entering its last days. In the age of high-performance aircraft and missiles, he said, the strategic value of a piece of high ground is increasingly negligible. Moreover, continued Fakruddin, most of the Israeli settlements are in the south of the Golan region and therefore are barely connected with "the Heights" at all. Israel does have a hydrological reason to concern itself with the Golan, because the region lies athwart the water resources of the Yarmouk River, as well as the Jordan and the Litani, and the Galilee Lake. But many of these water sources are in the south, and thus it would be feasible for the Shamir government to retain the south while returning the northern Golan, with its still predominantly Arab, Syrian and Druse character. This would be partition within partition, but it would not to the same extent be occupation.

This made sense of a sort. But then last week I went to hear Ze'ev Binyamin Begin, son of the old spellbinder and namesake of Jabotinsky, and now a candidate to succeed Shamir. "I would rather," he said, "refer to the Galilee as an integral part of the Golan than to the Golan as an integral part of the Galilee." It was at least novel to hear a part of Israel described as a part of Syria rather than the other way around. But the security argument, as ever, cuts both ways. If young Begin wants "secure and defensible" borders on these terms, he will have to extend them even wider than they are now, or evict the current inhabitants, or perhaps both.

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READING AROUND.

ELIZABETH POCHODA

Multicultural Watch

Too bad no one enlisted the help of Stephen Jay Gould in the recent debates over the curriculum. His essay on Charles Darwin's racism in **Natural History** this month ends with the clearest possible defense of multicultural studies. After making a sympathetic case for the limitations of the eminent Victorian, he asks what we should do about contemporary equivalents of a paternalism such as Darwin's and replies that insufficient appreciation of human differences can be repaired only by the "direct and sympathetic study of cultural diversity—the world's most fascinating subject in any case." He goes on to say that the attempt by conservatives to caricature the multicultural movement as leftist fascism ranks as "a cynical smoke screen spread to cover a power struggle for control of the curriculum. Yes, Shakespeare foremost and forever (Darwin too). But also teach about the excellence of Pygmy bushcraft and Fuegian survival in the world's harshest climate. Dignity and inspiration come in many guises. Would anyone choose the tinhorn patriotism of George Armstrong Custer over the eloquence of Chief Joseph in defeat?"

Big Little Magazines

What can it mean that both the rarefied **Parnassus: Poetry in Review** and the lowdown **Portable Lower East Side** have dedicated their current issues to the memory of Gregory Kolovakos, who died of AIDS last year? Mostly it means that even the expansive spirit of Kolovakos, who directed the literature program for the New York State Council on the Arts with a flair for both high culture and low, could not bridge the gap between the walled town of poetry for the few and the promiscuous city of porn for the many as represented in these two journals.

Parnassus labors away at the high culture in 414 pages of reviews, memoirs and essays in prose that is sometimes passionate, sometimes elegant and sometimes frankly unsayable when it is not unspeakable. There is a wonderfully plain-spoken, un-self-pitying memoir, "Kalala's Doll," by Wendy Gimble, and informative reviews-cum-essays on James Wright, John Haines and Marianne Moore; but apart from those and Mary Karr's essay "Against Decoration," on the current vogue for needlework poetry, there's not much that speaks to people who live outside the magic circle of writing schools and poetry readings. Nevertheless, the presence of Karr's piece is a promising sign of the sort that Kolovakos would have enjoyed. She discerns lots of clothes but no emperor within the verse she reads in **The New Yorker**, "flowery, emotionally dim poems" that cannot possibly move the reader. Karr worries that poetry has been cast adrift from the rest of American life, and she should, judging from the contents of many literary journals and little magazines.

I guess "Live Sex Acts," the title of the current issue of **The Portable Lower East Side**, was meant to be an eye-catching retreat from Mt. Parnassus. But here in 151 pages of interviews with erotic film stars, descriptions of peep shows, transcripts of phone sex, erotic encounters recollected in tranquillity and pointlessly raunchy photographs—all funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts—there is nothing remarkable or illuminating. Nothing objectionable either, although some twenty printers apparently disagreed and refused to do the issue. It's pigheaded people like that who encourage believers in the overwhelming cultural significance of porn to keep on with such projects.

Still, all is not lost between two poles in the world of letters. Lloyd Schwartz's essay on Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil in the September 30 issue of **The New Yorker** has enough critical (and some interesting biographical) cues to make people unfamiliar with the late poet go out and read her poems. Schwartz has also found an unpublished love poem, which he reprints in the article; though it is a minor work, it is done in the vivid, amusing Bishop style, with one of those heart-stopping endings at which she excelled.

Other hopeful signs in the literary world: **The Kenyon Review**, under the editorship of Marilyn Hacker, is currently casting a wide net over the culture with some surprising results. Poems by Yusef Komunyakaa and Jennifer Nelson (in the Spring and Summer issues, respectively) are neither ornamental nor emotionally dim. They sit beside fiction about the death camps by Arnost Lustig and a memoir of the sixties by Terry Castle, reminding us that taking a bold and promiscuous view of culture is a far better approach to editing a review than adopting the fastidious coterie mindset evidenced elsewhere. The newest **Kenyon Review**, titled "De Colores," is the best yet—a capacious, multicultural collection of pieces too good to have been assembled out of sentimental egalitarianism.

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

In the guise of one of those pebble-by-pebble histories of the universe, **The New Yorker** has published an interesting two-part profile (October 14 and 21) by Philip Schuyler of James Acord Jr., a sculptor who designs and builds nuclear sculpture in Richland, Washington. Acord has made a spectacle out of something most people have tried to forget—hazardous waste. He's interested in the permanence of art as a means of communicating across vast stretches of time—say, 30,000 years or so—and what more permanent material could he have chosen than radioactive matter? A minor irony in this is that after failing to obtain weapons-grade plutonium for his work, Acord hit upon the idea of using the highly collectible and highly radioactive Mango Red Fiesta dishes manufactured in the 1940s. (The State Office of Radiation Control in Washington forbade him from possessing more than fifteen pounds of Fiesta ware at any one time and required that he submit regular reports on his exposure to radiation from it.) Anyway, as you approach the 70,000-word mark in the Acord profile, your growing worries about the nuclear industry's enthusiasm for his work are balanced by your fascination with the issues that work raises. It would, by the way, be nice to see somewhere a picture of Acord's sculpture *Monstrance for a Grey Horse*, which is mentioned several dozen times in the piece.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

The Cheever Chronicle

TED SOLOTAROFF

THE JOURNALS OF JOHN CHEEVER. *Edited by Robert Gottlieb. Knopf. 399 pp. $25.*

A writer who maintained an intensely private profile through most of his career, John Cheever has been transformed in the decade since his death into a kind of Exhibit A for hidden damages in the trial of the literary life before the bar of publicity. In Cheever's case, the skeleton of his problems and misdeeds has flung open the closet door, with no little assistance from his family. His daughter, Susan, has expanded her cool exposure of him in *Home Before Dark* into an acerbic tour of three generations of "the family jungle" in *Treetops*, while his older son, Ben, has eagerly filled in the blanks of salacious information and innuendo in his edition of Cheever *père*'s letters. Now we have *The Journals* in which Cheever himself is thrust upon the stand to provide full disclosure of the dissolute life he bled into his fiction.

About five years ago, when the journals were put on the market, a colleague and I from Harper & Row visited Ms. Cheever to look through the twenty-eight thick notebooks that constituted the last remains of her father's vocation. Given the growing notoriety of his secret life, his relationships with such figures as Malcolm Cowley, Eleanor Clark and Robert Penn Warren, Saul Bellow, John Updike, Philip Roth et al., his frequent stays at Yaddo, his long association with *The New Yorker*, as well as his own significance as a fictional craftsman and social observer, I thought his journals might be very valuable, though hardly worth the cool $1 million the family was asking.

What this badly typed, misspelled and often unstrung prose contained was mainly a monotonous account of the Westchester round of visits and parties and a naked but less-than-riveting one of the at-home dissipations and marital distress of a mostly depressed and money-driven man. Now and then a trip into New York or elsewhere, a good morning's work at the desk or an afternoon of yard work or touch football or the opportunity to "have my way" with his wife would raise his spirits and eyes to the world and some interesting and moving passage would result. But these were few and far between: The image of Cheever that settled in my mind was of a writer who had just masturbated (he kept a record of that), doodling in the margins of his despair or boredom or occasional euphoria while waiting to hit the bottle. After a couple of hours my colleague and I shrugged and prepared to leave. I asked the noncommittal Ms. Cheever who would be editing the material and was told that she and her brother would. Well, I thought, a woman had to be pretty tough to survive the shambles of a home life I'd just glimpsed. Walking back to the office, I thought of Owl-Eyes' remark about the dead Gatsby, which Dorothy Parker repeated as she gazed at Fitzgerald's bier—"The poor son-of-a-bitch."

Ted Solotaroff is a contributing editor of The Nation.

Cheever's shame over his masturbation points up the struggle between the adolescent and the adult so apparent in The Journals.

So I was very surprised and not a little crestfallen to find myself fascinated by the excerpts of the journals that began appearing in *The New Yorker* last year. By the magic of editing, the suppleness and precision of Cheever's style had been detected and restored, triumphing over his "forlornities," as he put it, and his moments of joy, perceptiveness, circumspection and courage had been brought out to light and lighten the reader's journey. Now we have a full version of the passages that the editor, Robert Gottlieb, has carved out—about 5 percent of the total wordage—and my admiration for his editing is even higher since he has assembled this coherent text. It presents Cheever's inner life in what might be called a final draft: concise, lucid, moving, and brimming with implications. Not since *Look Homeward, Angel* has there been an editorial feat like this.

There is one important aspect of Cheever's personality that I picked up in my reading of the original journals that has been omitted from the published ones, except for some discreet references to the "dream girls" he was wont to summon at dark times or to his "sore cod": His compulsive masturbation contributed a good deal to his sense of being unmanned and unstrung. Since I looked at only about one-fourth of the journals, I can't say how steadily and intensely it persisted. Nor do I raise it to darken his image further. The compulsion is common among writers, the last of the loves that dares not confess its name. As one novelist recently put it, "Writers jerk off more than anyone else because they're alone so much and it's such a convenient fix for all the anxiety and frustration." Its characterological and vocational significance, of course, varies from one of us to the next. In Cheever's case his intense shame points up the struggle between the adolescent and the adult in his nature that is often apparent in *The Journals* and that kept him standing on a dime, psychologically speaking, for much of his career.

The popular view of Cheever these days is that he was tormented by his bisexuality and that the drinking was his way of assuaging the frustration and anxiety it bred. There is little evidence for that in *The Journals*. His bisexuality often turns up in the more ramifying context of the standoff, embalmed in alcohol, between the boy and the man. The following passage is worth quoting at length. It comes at a point when Cheever was in his mid-50s, going through one of his brief periods of psychotherapy and yet another marital crisis:

> I drink heavily because I claim to be troubled. We talk about the shrink at the table, and I expect I talk with drunken rancor. We go to a third-rate movie and, leaving, I cry. "Why, when I asked if the bulk of our life had not been happy, did you not reply?" "My look," she said, "was my reply." . . . I have one drink, no more, and sit on the stone steps. I think myself youthful, even boyish in my misery. I stretch out on the stones, sobbing, until I realize that I am exactly in the position of a doormat.

There is much of Cheever's plight in this passage. His frequent mood swings from resentment to self-pity pivoted on

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his fast dependency on Mary Cheever, which was cemented by her emotional and sexual aloofness. His term for it was her *maldisposta*, which runs through *The Journals* like a leitmotif of plaintive resignation. This adhesiveness to her moods was actually a compound, one part of which came from his relationship to his mother, who was also an independent and baiting woman named Mary, and, in the words of Cheever biographer Scott Donaldson, "not given to shows of affection." Because of his father's alcoholism and improvidence she became the family breadwinner, running a gift shop that enabled the family to hang on to its shabby respectability by its fingertips, which were to remain sore and exigent in John's case—the Westchester squire even though he was renting the coach house of the estate. She resented doing the housework, which often fell to him, another early experience that he sometimes bleakly refers to in *The Journals* in the course of grumbling about his role in his marriage as a househusband. When Mary Cheever took up college teaching and began to go her own way, the two halves of Cheever's life, which he had labored to keep separate since leaving home for good at 18, ironically came together and shut.

The passage I quoted above continues:

> I sleep in my own bed, although this seems to be an indignity. I wake at dawn, crying, "Give me the river, the river, the river," but the river that appears has willows and is winding and is not the river I want. It looks like a trout stream, so I cast with a fly and take a nice trout. A naked woman with global breasts lies on the grassy banks and I mount her. She is replaced by Adonis, and, while I fondle him briefly, it seems like an unsuitable pastime for a grown man. . . . I take a pill this morning, and it seems best for me to take full responsibility for everything that has gone wrong. There is no point in recounting to myself rebuffs, wounding quarrels, etc. One has come through much; one will come through this.

Readers of *Bullet Park* will remember the young and stricken Tony Nailles crying out in his sleep, "Give me the mountains, the mountains." The passage represents a characteristic move of Cheever's spirit from childishness to maturity and from despair to determination along the sure route of his feeling for the natural world and the tricky one of his hyperactive eroticism; his tendency to regard his gayness as immaturity, his straightness, when requited, to feeling like a man.

Donaldson raises the possibility that Cheever and his older brother Fred may have been lovers, following hints from Cheever himself. What is indisputable is their unusual intimacy. Unwanted and unloved by his feuding parents—"I have the characteristics of a bastard," he writes at one point—he improvised a succession of father figures, but his main resource was the care and support of Fred. After he left home they lived and traveled together, and it was Fred's money that enabled him to begin a second life as a writer. But there was a crucial lacuna in his adolescence when his brother was away at college that continued to haunt him and that he was condemned to refrequent psychologically. He writes of the "galling loneliness of my adolescence" that was still assailing him at the height of his career: "the sense of the voyeur, the lonely, lonely boy with no role in life but to peer in at the lighted windows of other people's contentment and vitality."

Cheever's adolescent fixations, his "damaged consecutiveness of growth," appear in various contexts. The day that his second son, Federico, was born—"I don't ever remember loving a child so much"—and filled with paternal well-being, he finds himself gazing at some

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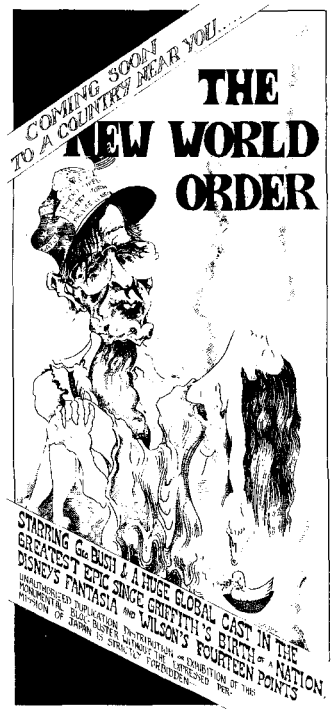
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young men in an open car and "coveting their freedom." So with others—a male washing himself from a bucket or pulling off his swimming trunks or taping an oar would be glimpsed for a moment and envied for years. The furtiveness and daring of early sexuality also played a large role in his homoerotic excitements: His attraction to boys and men would often disappear as soon as any more normative social connection was made. Watching someone cunningly expose "his whatsit" in the men's room in Grand Central Station, he is tempted to throw himself into an "erotic abyss" as well as to "make some claim for man's wayward and cataclysmic nature." Then, true to form, he returns home, takes Federico swimming and is restored to the manly virtues—"Decency, courage, resoluteness."

His relationship to Federico also has an adolescent cast, as though he were more like a big brother than his father. His son Ben received a good deal of his anxiety and guilt in the name of discipline and criticism; his daughter is typically either annoying or mystifying. But as the younger son, like Cheever himself, Federico was a piece of perfection: "How my whole love of life seems to gather around his form; how he fills me with the finest ambitions," and so on for the next fifteen years, the person, besides himself, for whom he remained married and mostly at home. His terror of loneliness was such that he viewed divorce as a life sentence to some sordid furnished room, and even in the worst stretches of Mary's *maldisposta* and his own immobilizing depressions, he could "count on touching my younger son at breakfast as a kind of link, a means of staying alive."

Read in the light and shadow of *The Journals*, Cheever's fiction tends to take on a certain unity until *Falconer*, when he kicked his alcoholism and the adult in him finally triumphed over the anxious, lonely and subversive boy. Through most of his career the conflict between them informed his work as a kind of tense lyrical moralism in which the inner waywardness and discontent beat against the bulwarks of propriety, responsibility and well-being. In many of the stories his virtually interchangeable protagonists carry the haut-bourgeois burden of obligations which when put down results in a pratfall of panic or humiliation—a child is temporarily lost, an adulterer is shamed, a liar is exposed, a failed businessman reduced to housebreaking is terrified—before the beneficence of life, often borne in by the natural world, intervenes and the moral order reasserts itself, "the obdurate truths before which fear and horror are powerless," as he put it, whistling in the dark of his melancholia. Cheever's typical, money-driven, emotionally constrained story settles for a kind of wry headshake over the vices and follies of human nature, the strain of its social arrangements, the ironies of its providence. When he is bearing down hard in his stories, the family man forsakes his burden, the family pathology is exposed, the stupidity and cruelty of the ad agency or other genteel business assert themselves. When the destructive element Cheever knew so well is given its full say, one gets the surrealism of the Fall through the amenities and assurances of polite society into the hell that lurks in his best stories—such as "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill," "Torchsong," "The Swimmer," "Goodbye My Brother," "The Death of Justine"—where the punishments of guilt are let loose, dreamlike, in the daily world.

His own best critic, the Cheever of *The Journals* worried about his "confined talents." Alongside the magnitude of *The Naked and the Dead*, "my autumn roses and winter twilights [seem] not to be in the big league." Or there is Bellow's "big, wild, rowdy country . . . and here I am stuck with an old river in the twilight and the deterioration of the middle-aged businessman." As time went on he deplored his lack of development. Compared with writers who are much closer to him in milieu and temperament, such as Updike or William Trevor, his power of invention seems cruelly curtailed and his exploration of modern life hugs the shoreline of a small homogeneous community of the privileged and ungrateful, who re-enact his "wanton disappointments" ("Why should so many of us struggle to forget our happy lot?") as viewed by the old-line moralism of his New England upbringing ("Is it the ineradicable strain of guilt and vengefulness in man's nature?").

Seldom has such a sensitive and subtle observer, as evidenced by *The Journals*, written so patly so much of the time in his fiction. One could say that his money problems drove him to write for magazines that wanted mostly small and not-too-bitter doses of social and personal disturbance. But when Cheever gave himself more autonomy and scope, as in the two Wapshot novels, his imagination shows little questing power, his narrative ability weakens and one gets a series of

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incidents and ruminations connected by a mood. *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957), though much praised in its time, reads today like an exercise in nostalgia, paper-thin in its social texture of the thirties and forties, a regression to the dawn of the modern novel in its technique. *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964) is also a mood novel, this time a vehicle for Cheever's mordant but mostly aesthetic response (shopping malls, subdivisions) to the rootlessness and barbarism of postwar America. Its structure is reminiscent of a man trying to hold together a bead necklace whose string has broken, and its bewildered characters portray the emptiness of the American scene mostly by lamely imitating it.

In *Bullet Park* (1969) Cheever returns to his base, and much of his earlier ease and conviction concerning the Westchester gentry are again in evidence in the first part, though hardly deepened. But structurally and dramatically the novel then becomes a botch: two novellas in different modes joined by an attempted murder that comes out of the blue. Written in a period when Cheever's alcoholism and marriage were hitting bottom, its principal interest and poignancy is in Cheever's objectification of his twin demons of drink and melancholia in the characterization of Hammer and of his guardian spirit of rectitude embodied in the troubled, addicted but upright Nailles. The absurd ending, in which Nailles rescues his son Tony with his chain saw (Cheever's favorite tool) from Hammer's mad clutches, only adds to the inadvertent pathos of the fable.

While giving much richer and more harrowing expression to his understanding of how "the force of life is contested," *The Journals* have some of the same hemmed-in narrowness of Cheever's *oeuvre*. For years at a stretch not much changes except the hour at which he begins drinking, which grows earlier and earlier. "My best hours are from five to six," he writes at one point, by which he means A.M. However much personal nuance there may be to a life at bay, it inexorably repeats itself and one begins to long for the kind of material of literary and social interest that the journals of an Evelyn Waugh or Edmund Wilson provide. The fifties, the sixties, the seventies go by with seldom even a nod in the direction of the public dramas of McCarthyism or the civil rights movement, the cultural revolution, the Vietnam War, Watergate and so forth. The hoax of Updike's death draws forth a splendid impromptu eulogy that makes one regret Cheever's

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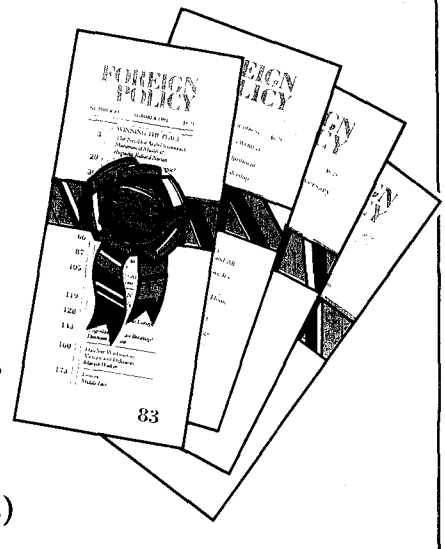

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professional reticence otherwise. He mentions an author he is reading such as Borges or Nabokov or Hemingway, drops a tantalizing opinion and returns to his self-reflections, his local and travel notes, his family's behavior, his "chains formed by turf and house paint," his flings, his moral temperature-taking. After a couple of hundred pages one begins trying to keep track of the initials by which most of the people he encounters are identified, simply to stay interested.

But there is a change of tone and a more objective focus in the last years. His love life finally stabilizes in a guilt-free association with the devoted M., he and Mary stop relating to each other like two hostile porcupines, the wealth and fame he has been craving come in abundance with *Falconer* (1977). The sobriety that enabled him finally to sustain an entire novel; to venture deep into "the stupid pageantry of judgment" that prison life represented and enacted—his personal subject at last finding a new and challenging home; and to write with the passion and empathy of self-detachment (except about Ezekiel Farragut's wife) also finds its way into *The Journals*. His record of his last year lived in the world of cancer is a remarkable document in itself, climaxed by a stunning incident when he and other chemotherapy patients are joined by a beautiful bald woman with "a look of absolute victory on her face." Cheever's joy in her "air of having bested the tumors and carnage of the disease" became in this reader's mind a recognition of his victory over his own psychic tumors and carnage. Or again, he talks to his dogs of the first snowfall of his life that he will not be able to work or sport in, and their imperturbability prompts him to ask himself, "Whatever made me think that I would live forever?" This is Cheever giving up the narcissism of a lifetime, an outcropping of the steady manliness he was always asking of himself and which, in the last years, he made come true. □

Separate and Unequal

RUTH SIDEL

SAVAGE INEQUALITIES: Children in America's Schools. *By Jonathan Kozol. Crown. 252 pp. $20.*

In his latest book, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, Jonathan Kozol describes the city of East St. Louis, Illinois: 98 percent black, with no obstetric services, no regular garbage collection and few jobs. East St. Louis is located in easily flooded lowlands called the Bottoms. Raw sewage flows into basements, playgrounds and backyards all over the city. Lead levels are "astronomical" and fumes from nearby chemical plants poison the air. Premature births and infant mortality rates are extraordinarily high and the majority of children are underimmunized. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has described East St. Louis, where 75 percent of the population receives some form of public assistance, as "the most distressed small city in America." The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* describes it as "America's Soweto."

The schools of East St. Louis mirror these horrendous conditions: In 1989 both the Martin Luther King Junior High School and the East St. Louis Senior High School had to be closed after sewage flowed into the kitchen and from the toilets. The same week more than 500 school employees were laid off. The remaining teachers face constant shortages of chalk and paper, the sports facilities are in tatters and the science labs are thirty to fifty years out of date. One teacher states, "I have done without so much for so long that if I were assigned to a suburban school I'm not sure I'd recognize what they were doing. We are utterly cut off."

East St. Louis sets the tone for this moving, often shocking, always heartbreaking book. After his searing depiction of schools there, Kozol goes on to describe inferior, underfinanced, often physically dangerous schools in poor communities and lavish, state-of-the-art, incredibly affluent schools in and around Chicago, New York, the Camden–Cherry Hill area of New Jersey and Washington, D.C. Kozol's special skill is the ability to weave together detailed descriptions of facilities, analyses of the financial situation in each school and district and, above all, interviews with teachers, students and administrators in which he seems to uncover the heart of what they are thinking and feeling. Using these techniques he brings the reader with him during his two-year investigation of schools in some thirty neighborhoods across the country.

What startled Kozol most, and will be indelibly stamped on anyone who reads this important book, is the "remarkable degree of racial segregation that persisted almost everywhere," particularly outside the Deep South. Most of the urban schools he visited were 95 to 99 percent nonwhite and, what is perhaps even more disturbing, few people in positions of power were interested in addressing the issue of segregation. As Kozol states, "The dual society, at least in public education, seems in general to be unquestioned."

Not only is the U.S. public education system virtually separate but it is grossly unequal. Kozol describes conditions in many of the Chicago schools: a shortage of teachers (on an average morning 5,700 children in 190 classrooms have no teacher); a shortage of supplies (chemistry labs without beakers, water or bunsen burners; playgrounds and gyms without rudimentary equipment; toilets without toilet paper); and a system that long ago gave up on its students ("If a kid comes in not reading," according to one Chicago high school English teacher, "he goes out not reading").

Kozol points out that poor children in some of the worst inner-city schools often start their education with "faith and optimism, and they often seem to thrive during the first few years." But by the third grade their teachers see signs of failure, by the fourth grade the children themselves see failure looming and by fifth or sixth grade many are skipping school; as Kozol states, the route from truanting to dropping out is "direct and swift."

In contrast, the principal of the New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois, states confidently, "Our goal is for students to be successful." The school, situated on twenty-seven suburban acres, offers Latin and six other foreign languages; the senior English class is reading Nietzsche, Darwin, Plato, Freud and Goethe. In addition to seven gyms and an Olympic-size swimming pool, New Trier operates a television station. Every freshman is assigned a faculty adviser who counsels roughly two dozen students. At Du Sable, a high school in nearby Chicago, each guidance counselor advises 420 students.

The conditions are duplicated in and around each city Kozol visited. In New York City two schools barely fifteen minutes apart by car reveal the same patterns.

Ruth Sidel is a professor of sociology at Hunter College. Her most recent book is On Her Own: Growing Up in the Shadow of the American Dream *(Penguin).*

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Public School 261 in the North Bronx is located in what was once a roller-skating rink. No sign identifies the building as a school; the building has no windows. Four kindergartens and a sixth-grade class of Spanish-speaking children share one room. One full-time and one part-time counselor are available to work with the 1,300 children, 90 percent of whom are black or Latino. Textbooks are scarce and students must often share those that are available.

In the same school district, just a few miles to the west, P.S. 24 is situated in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, a residential area with parks, libraries, large cooperative apartment buildings and many beautiful, expensive homes. The school serves 825 children from kindergarten through the sixth grade. Kozol describes essentially three groupings within the school: one for special classes for the mentally retarded, in which most of the students are poor and black or Latino; one for mainstream students, the vast majority of whom are white and Asian; and a third track for "gifted" students. As Kozol observes, the fourth-grade gifted class is "humming with excitement." The class, according to the teacher, emphasizes "critical thinking, reasoning and logic." The students were at that time writing a new Bill of Rights, examining a concept their personal experience clearly helps them to understand.

Report after report has shown that the poorest districts in New York receive significantly lower allocations than the wealthier districts and that per-pupil expenditures within the city of New York ($5,500 in 1987) are dramatically lower than comparable expenditures in the affluent suburbs surrounding the city (more than $11,000 in some of the affluent communities on Long Island). The same differentials exist, of course, in all the metropolitan areas Kozol examines. The per-pupil expenditure was, for example, $5,500 in the late 1980s in Chicago secondary schools, compared with $8,500 to $9,000 in the highest-spending northern suburbs. But the ultimate meaning of these savage inequalities is their impact on the lives, feelings and self-image of the children themselves. The children movingly speak of the enormous discrepancies between schools for the affluent and schools for the poor, between schools for white children and schools for children of color. A 14-year-old girl states, "We have a school in East St. Louis named for Dr. King. The school is full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains. Every student in that school is black. It's like a terrible joke on history." A Latino boy from a high school in the South Bronx says, "People on the outside may think that we don't know what it is like for other students, but we *visit* other schools and we have eyes and we have brains. You cannot hide the differences. You see it and compare." Or an eleventh grader from Camden, New Jersey: "So long as there are no white children in our school, we're going to be cheated. That's America. That's how it is." The children in these schools may not acquire the skills so necessary for living in a postindustrial society, but they certainly learn the explicit meaning of living in a profoundly racist and classist society. Moreover, the children in affluent neighborhoods also absorb the message of living in a grossly unequal society in which individual success is the highest good. Students in the affluent New York City suburb of Rye for the most part oppose busing, suggest a "separate but equal" solution to the problems of inequity in education and offer a blame-the-victim analysis of differences in educational opportunity. When Kozol asks about the possibility of raising taxes in order to equalize educa-

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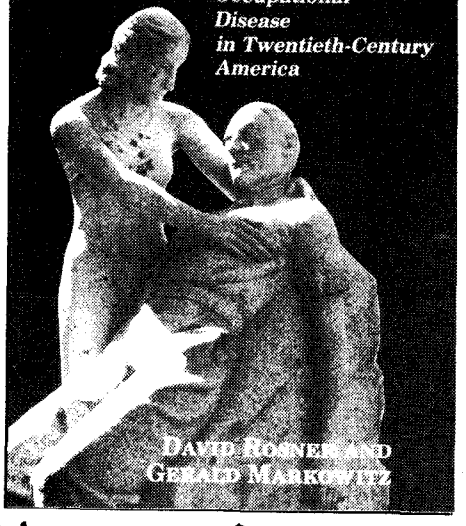

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tional opportunities one student succinctly summarizes the ideology of the 1980s and the 1990s: "I don't see how that benefits me."

Ultimately, Kozol addresses the central issue of educational equity in a country that prides itself on equal opportunity. As he points out, funding education, particularly during a time of federal cutbacks to human services and extreme reluctance to raise taxes, is a zero-sum game. Additional money for Chicago schools is likely to mean less money for Winnetka students. Improved facilities for students in the rest of the Bronx will, in all likelihood, mean fewer resources for students in Riverdale. Since 1989, when the Texas Supreme Court struck down the old school-financing system based primarily on property taxes, Texas political leaders have searched for a method of attaining school equity. Currently, the so-called Robin Hood plan is in effect there, which takes property-tax money from rich districts and distributes it among poorer districts. Predictably, rich districts complain they will be reduced to mediocrity while poor ones claim they still do not have the resources they need. But the Robin Hood plan may appear elsewhere as well, as lawsuits challenging school financing are under way in twenty-two other states.

The issue is not likely to disappear. The publication of *Savage Inequalities* will insure that the injustice and incredible shortsightedness of American educational policy are vividly and compassionately brought to the forefront of the public's consciousness and the agenda of policymakers. As with his earlier books, particularly *Death at an Early Age* and *Rachel and Her Children*, Jonathan Kozol movingly and persuasively documents the devastating inequities in American society and provides information and insight that will help move the country toward a more humane educational policy.

But, as Kozol clearly recognizes, a more humane educational policy is not enough. Until the millions of American children who currently live in poverty have an adequate standard of living, until the millions of American children who are hungry have enough to eat, until the millions of homeless children have an adequate place to live, and until all children have first-rate health care, we will not begin to develop a just society. The awareness, discussion and, it is to be hoped, action engendered by *Savage Inequalities* will move us closer to that achievable goal. □

The Trouble With Harry

JOHN LEONARD

HARLOT'S GHOST. *By Norman Mailer. Random House. 1,310 pp. $30.*

In 1976 in *New York* magazine, Mailer sneezed black-magic metaphors all over Watergate and the C.I.A., Marilyn Monroe and Howard Hughes, Kafka and the Mormons. At once a shaman and an exorcist, he changed shapes and split the lips of his wound: "Is America governed by accident more than we are ready to suppose, or by design? And if by design, is the design sinister?"

> Trying to understand whether our real history is public or secret, exposed or—at the highest level—underground, is equal to exploring the opposite theaters of our cynicism and our paranoia. . . . What a crazy country we inhabit. What a harlot. What a brute. She squashes sausage out of the minds of novelists on their hotfooted way to a real good plot.

Harlot's Ghost is the elephantiasis of that article: a lot of sausage, spicy and nourishing as far as it goes, but not going far enough. On the book's own calendar, it's still short twenty years. Mailer will try to talk his way around this gap. His editor, Jason Epstein, has already told *The New York Times* that *Harlot's Ghost* is a "test for reviewers—one that I fear will find many of them wanting." But this is a pre-emptive condescension. After 1,300 pages of often brilliant tease—Popol Vuh and Victorian gothic, Vico and Nietzsche, Italian opera and Mahler symphony, Book of Kells and Book of the Dead—Mailer fails to deliver the ultimate intimacy. TO BE CONTINUED, he tells us, but we've waited almost as long for his C.I.A. novel as we waited for his Egyptian novel, and it's like waiting for Zapata or the Red Sox.

I was not in the CIA to become a bureaucrat but a hero. —*Harry Hubbard*

Suppose Julien Sorel had joined the C.I.A. instead of the Catholic Church, or C.P. Snow had written *Strangers & Brothers* about modern-day Templar spooks instead of social-climbing slide rules. "The Company" may be America's prep school and Episcopal Church, our Counter-Reformation and our Fourth Crusade, but it is also Norman Mailer's spirit world—his Scath and Xibalba, his Jigoku and Jahannam, his kamavacara and his Universal Baseball Association.

Just kidding. Or am I? "Irrationality," Mailer says, "is the only great engine of history." So much for the class struggle. Skip the next couple paragraphs if you hate plot synopsis.

New England blueblood Herrick (Harry) Hubbard joins the C.I.A. in 1955, fresh out of Yale and "as pretty as Montgomery Clift." He is joining his father, Cal (a Robert Lowell reference I don't pretend to fathom), and his godfather, "Harlot" (Hugh Tremont Montague, who brightened Harry's boyhood by teaching him to climb rocks). Harry is posted to Berlin at the time of the tunnel, where he consorts with pistol-packing William King Harvey; to Montevideo, where he traffics with the Arbenz-bashing E. Howard Hunt; to Miami, in time for the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban missile crisis and Operation Mongoose, where he beds down with playgirl Modene Murphy (an avatar of Judith Campbell Exner), thus communing with Sam Giancana, Frank Sinatra, Jack Kennedy, Fidel Castro, Howard Hughes and Marilyn Monroe. What happens to Harry after the assassination of J.F.K. is not entirely clear because most of it's been omitted. *A 1,310-page novel about the C.I.A. leaves out Vietnam, Watergate, Nicaragua and Iran-amok, not to mention running drugs, laundering money and fingering Mandela.* This much, we are vouchsafed:

Between 1964 and 1984, Harry saves the life of Harlot's wife, Hadley Kittredge Gardiner Montague, who is not only "an absolute beauty," a Jackie Kennedy look-alike, but also a "genius" who develops her own anti-Freudian theory of personality while working of course for the C.I.A. After Harlot kills his son and cripples himself climbing more metaphorical rocks, Harry steals Kittredge for himself, while continuing to counterspy for Harlot. In 1984, Kittredge, in turn, is stolen by Dix Butler, an Agency "asset" and bisexual megabucks *Übermensch*, and Harlot's body, with its face shot off, washes up from Chesapeake Bay. Did Harlot kill himself? Was he murdered? Or has he, in fact, defected to the K.G.B.? Harry leaves Maine for Moscow to find out. In Moscow, among these many mystifications, he is abandoned by his creator. And that's all I'm going to tell you, because from now on, instead of reviewing this novel, I intend to haunt it, like the pirate ghost Augustus Farr, like the C.I.A. in America's kinky closet. (We are *spooked*!)

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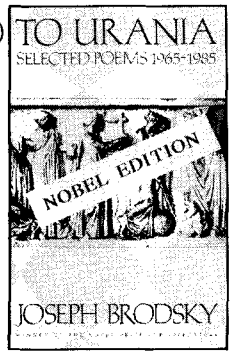

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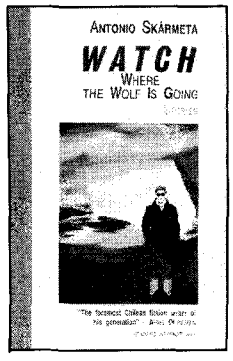

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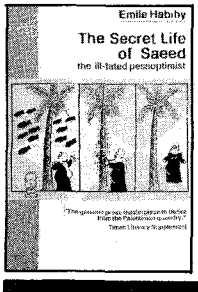

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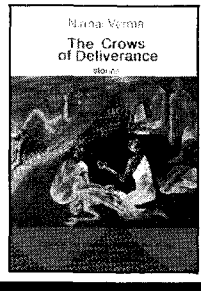

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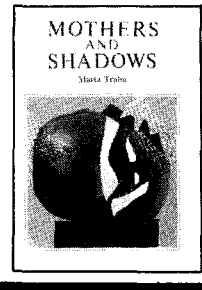

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What, indeed, did Picasso teach us if not that every form offers up its own scream when it is torn? —*Norman Mailer*

We learn about the trouble with Harry from two manuscripts—a shortie called "Omega," set in Orwell's 1984, and a gargantua called "Alpha," maybe the longest flashback in world literature, covering everything else up to 1964. These manuscripts correspond to the two halves of the human psyche as identified by Kittredge for the C.I.A. They also try out almost every narrative form known to the Mother Russian Novel: picaresque and epistolary; *Bildungsroman* and *roman à clef*; the historical, the gothic, the pornographic; the thriller and the western. There are also journal jottings, cable traffic, interoffice memorandums and transcripts of wiretaps.

For so many species of story, there are as many tics of prose; seizures and afflatus. When his battery's charged, Mailer windmills from one paragraph to the next—baroque, anal, Talmudic, olfactory, portentous, loopy, coy, Egyptian; down and dirty in the cancer, the aspirin or the plastic; shooting moons on sheer vapor; blitzed by paranoia and retreating for a screen pass, as if bitten in the pineal gland by a deranged Swinburne, with metaphors so meaning-moistened that they stick to our thumbs, with "intellections" (as he once put it) slapped on "like adhesive plasters." When he chooses to, he also speaks in tongues. Harlot sounds like Whittaker Chambers. Modene Murphy sounds like Lauren Bacall. Bill Harvey sounds like L. Ron Hubbard or Lyndon LaRouche. The guilt-ridden Uruguayan double-agent Chevi Fuentes sounds like Frantz Fanon and Octavio Paz. Harry sounds like Rousseau's Émile when he isn't sounding like Wilhelm Reich, and Kittredge sounds like Flaubert's Salammbô when she isn't sounding like Hannah Arendt, and together they sound like Nichols and May. And everybody sounds like Mailer, as if picking up quasar signals from Sirius the Dog Star through a plate in the head; as if bodies, vegetables and objects all had distinctive vibrations, special stinks and personal divinities, angels in the meatloaf, demons in the Tupperware. Even money comes "in all kinds of emotional flavors." Ghosts! Pirates! Indians! Animism! Alchemy!

You either like this stuff or you don't, and I do.

Nor are the usual obsessions neglected, like boxing, bulls and booze. And Marilyn Monroe: Harry's father, Cal, has a theory that Hoffa bumped her off, hoping to pin the rap on Bobby. And Hemingway: Cal says he beat Papa at armwrestling one dark and stormy Stork Club night. And LSD: Kittredge seems to have invented it in a lab at Langley. And Martin Buber: I'm convinced Mailer has rendered Harry, for all his WASPishness, "one-eighth" Jewish just so Harlot can tell him to read *Tales of the Hasidim*. And of course manhood: Like all Mailermen, who are happiest in motion, in boats and in beds, Harry finds that "happiness is experienced most directly in the intervals between terror," which may be "our simple purpose on earth." If we "surmount that terror . . . we can, perhaps, share some of God's fear."

This means a lot of rock climbing, some polo and an invasion of Cuba. Thinks Harry:

> So many of these officers had spent their lives getting ready for a great moment—it was as if one lived as a vestal

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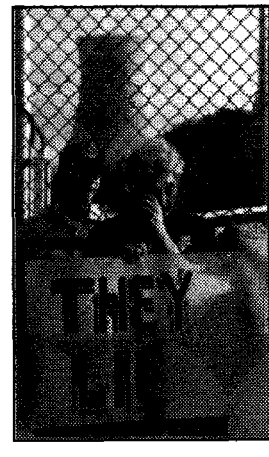

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virgin who would be allowed to copulate just once, but in a high temple: The act had better be transcendent, or one had chosen the wrong life.

If this Prep School Ethos is hard on Kittredge, tough darts:

> I gave up the thought of explaining to her that the natural condition of men's lives was fear of tests, physical even more than mental tests. Highly developed skills of evasion went into keeping ourselves removed from the center of our cowardice. . . . So I could not help it—I admired men who were willing to live day by day with bare-wire fear even if it left them naked as drunks, incompetent wild men, accident-prone. I understood the choice.

It's even harder on Castro, but he's so neolithic macho, he will surely understand:

> I would mourn Fidel if we succeeded, mourn him in just the way a hunter is saddened by the vanished immanence of the slain beast. Yes, one fired a bullet into beautiful animals in order to feel nearer to God: To the extent that we were criminal, we could approach the cosmos only by stealing a piece of the Creation.

You need no longer wonder: Why Are We in Vietnam? Or Iraq? Or Marilyn Monroe?

I could say, to stretch a point, that we were being schooled in minor arts of sorcery. Are not espionage and magic analogous? —*Harlot*

If paranoia is our culture's weather, all that lightning, then Mailer, bless him, puts up a kite instead of an umbrella. But having grown up on him, we already know that we have enemies. It's harder to amaze us. It's a tough break for the old exorcist that Don DeLillo, Joan Didion and Stan Lee in *Dunn's Conundrum* have already covered so much of his territory; that Robin Winks has already written his book about Yale and the C.I.A.; that Tom Mangold has just published a biography of James Jesus Angleton; that Robert Gates twisted in the Senate wind; that Pete Brewton's S&L stories and the magnitude of the B.C.C.I. scandal are so much more fantastic to contemplate than the C.I.A. conspiracy in *Harlot's Ghost*: to finance itself by cashing in on insider tips before the Federal Reserve Board fiddles with the interest rates. What's new, Norman?

Well, he really likes these guys. And why not? If you can identify with Gary Gilmore, not to mention Menenhetet, how hard can it be to identify with Allen Dulles? Besides, the old Social Bandit has been soft on WASPs since the moonshot, when he mindmelded with the astronauts. And he's summered forever in New England, with its sermons, charades and whaling-ship water games. Of course: Harry will lose his innocence and Harry *is* America—that's the point of these many pages—but what a boys' club it seems to him at the start, what a Skull and Bones, a *safe* house, a happy hunting ground of Hoplites, Berserkirs and Samurai, storm-cloud Maruts and Taoist warrior-sages, Gilgamesh, Achilles, Arjuna, Crazy Horse—with secret books, sacred seals and nifty computer graphics. It's Rosicrucian, Cabalistic, Druidical! I mean, they have castles on the Rhone, chateaus on the Loire, temples in Kyoto. Why not great Baals with glowing red-hot bellies and Tantric miniatures depicting Kundalini; Nuremberg Maidens with hearts full of nails; ramsing, the horn of Tugs, hanging from a banyan; the altar of sacrifice to Yaldabaoth; menhirs, tes-

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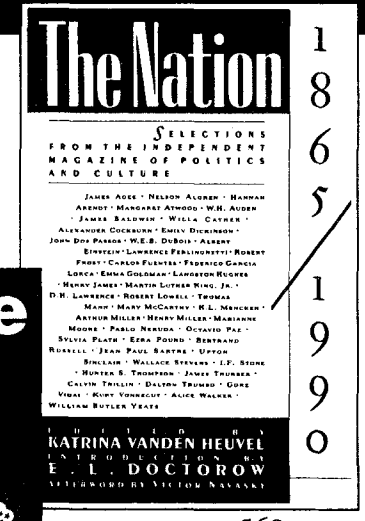

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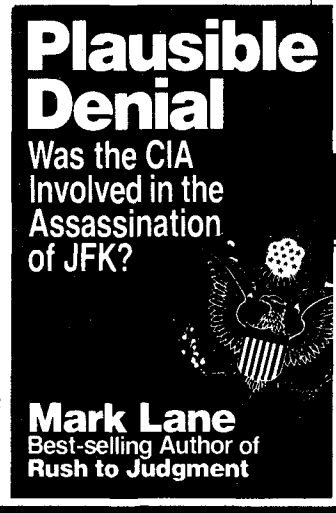

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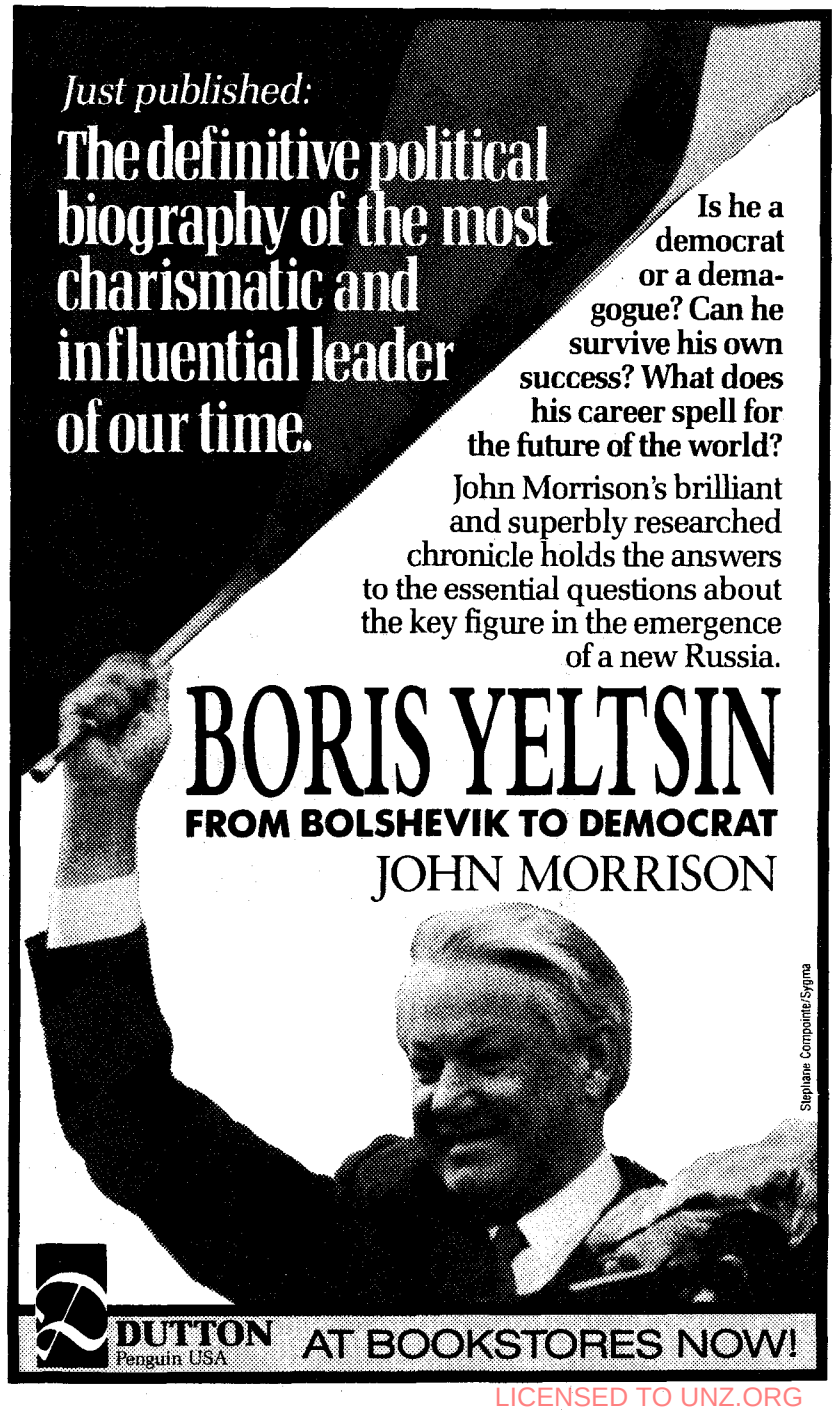
seracts, an orgone box, a Swedenborg death mask, a black Celtic virgin (for Sergius O'Shaugnessy) and, in the reliquary, the foreskin of Hermes Trismegistus? (I'm sorry, it's catching.) But what we get instead is Harlot. Harlot seems to be Mailer's version of James Jesus Angleton, the Fisher King of counterespionage. Like Angleton, he's suspicious of everybody else at Langley, and was taken in by Kim Philby, and doesn't really believe in the Sino-Soviet split. As Angleton was referred to variously at the Agency as Mother, Poet, Fisherman and (aha!) Gray Ghost, so Montague is referred to not only as "Harlot" but also as "Trimsky" (for a Trotsky-like salt-and-pepper mustache) and "Gobby" (for "God's old beast"). Instead of orchids, rocks.

Angleton shows up as a character in dozens of fictions, from Ludlum to Bellow. Even after he was forcibly retired in 1974, he was still obsessed that a Soviet "mole" had penetrated to the nation's very cerebellum. Everywhere he looked, he saw "doubles." If *he* could imagine it, *they* must be doing it. It's with Angleton that we associate the phrase "wilderness of mirrors." He had been, after all, a Futurist poet at Yale, and published a literary magazine, *Furioso*, full of difficult modernists like Pound, whose enthusiasm for Mussolini was apparently contagious. T.S. Eliot was a buddy of young Angleton's; Thomas Mann came for lunch. No wonder that when he looked in the labyrinth at Langley for the pattern in the magic carpet, all he saw were doubles and moles, counterfeit identities, masks of the Other. Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Kafka, Nabokov: alienation of the self, by the self, against the self. Suppose they're all characters in one another's novels? And no wonder writers love Angleton so much: What else is modernism but counterintelligence? Our paranoia is a *text*.

In *Libra*, DeLillo imagines an "occult" of intelligence agencies, a "theology of secrets," the latest in Gnostic heresies, gone to holy war against nihilism, terrorism, inauthenticity and incoherence. Robin Winks tells us in *Cloak & Gown* that John Hollander, then on the Yale faculty, was so struck while reading Sir John Masterman's *The Double-Cross System* by the code names in the book (Mutt and Jeff, Brutus and Bronx, Zigzag and Tricycle) that he sat down and wrote a book-length poem, *Reflections on Espionage*, "with spies standing for writers and thinkers, living a kind of hidden life in the actual world," with Pound and Auden and Lowell in code.

This is weird stuff, made-to-order for gonzo novelizing. But Mailer shies away from most of it, as he shies away from seeing Latin America or Europe as anything other than geographies of the Agency mind, pale-fire Zemblas. Yes, he has fun with the minor players. If Howard Hunt isn't quite as flamboyant here as his alter egos in his own David St. John thrillers, Bill Harvey comes on like Henderson the Rain King. The old shaman has even more fun with code names: In Berlin: BOZO, GIBLETS, SWIVET and CATHETER. In Montevideo: AV/OCADO, AV/ANTGARDE, AV/OIRDUPOIS, AV/EMARIA. And in Miami, to sort out the bedfellowship of Mafia and Camelot in Operation HEEDLESS, Jack Kennedy is code-named IOTA, Sam Giancana is RAPUNZEL, Murphy/Exner is BLUEBEARD and Frank Sinatra is STONEHENGE. I love it.

But the old Druid hasn't given Harlot enough juice to be an Angleton, a paranoid synecdoche. Harlot's supposed to wow us, as he wows Harry, Dix and Arnie Rosen in their early Agency days. But when he talks about a Third World still clinging "to pre-Christian realms—awe,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paranoia, slavish obedience to the leader, divine punishment," or explains that the C.I.A. buys up bankers, psychiatrists, narcs, trade unionists, hooligans and journalists because "our real duty is to become the mind of America," he seems to belong more to a Bill Buckley/Blackford Oakes penny dreadful than to a John le Carré requiem mass. Just once, brooding on relations between Dzerzhinsky, the godfather of the K.G.B., and the White Russian Yakovlev, does Harlot sound like an Angleton:

> When seduction is inspired . . . by the demands of power, each person will lie to the other. Sometimes, they lie to themselves. These lies often develop structures as aesthetically rich as the finest filigree of truth. After a time, how could Yakovlev and Dzerzhinsky know when they were dealing with truth or a lie? The relationship had grown too deep. They had had to travel beyond their last clear principles. They could no longer know when they were true to themselves. The self, indeed, was in migration.

But that is the last we hear from Harlot on this subject for another 800 pages. And then there's what I take to be the crucial exchange between Harlot and Bill Harvey, although they are talking to Harry instead of each other, from opposite ends of the novel. First, we get Harlot:

> The aim is to develop teleological mind. Mind that dwells above the facts; mind that leads us to larger purposes. Harry, the world is going through exceptional convulsions. The twentieth century is fearfully apocalyptic. Historical constitutions that took centuries to develop are melting into lava. Those 1917 Bolsheviks were the first intimation. Then came the Nazis. God, they were a true exhalation from Hell. The top of the mountain blew off. Now the lava is starting to move. . . . Lava is entropy. It reduces all systems. Communism is the entropy of Christ, the degeneration of higher spiritual forms into lower ones. To oppose it, we must, therefore, create a fiction—that the Soviets are a mighty military machine who will overpower us, unless we are more powerful. The truth is that they will overpower us if the passion to resist them is not regenerated, by will if necessary, every year, every minute.

Later, it's Harvey, larger than life, like DeLillo's David Ferrie, a paranoid's paranoid:

> There is opposition to entropy. The universe may not necessarily wind down. There is something forming that I would call new embodiment. Entropy and embodiment may be as related as antimatter and matter. . . . Yes, . . . the forms deteriorate and they all run down to the sea, but other possibilities come together in their wake to seek *embodiment*. Blobs are always looking to articulate themselves into a higher form of blob. There *is* a tropism toward form, Hubbard. It counters decomposition.

What does this mean? Jason Epstein has found me wanting. On Mailer's last page, we are told that Harlot is *Harry's* embodiment, but otherwise this sounds remarkably like one of those rough beasts slouching out of a Yeats poem to be born again, a mystagogic man-god. And Harry has gone to Moscow to sit at Dzerzhinsky's feet, and this embodiment of Harlot would seem to be whispering that God is the ultimate spy, that evolution is just a cover story, that the universe is basically disinformation. Maybe, but the novel itself has no more got us to such a realization than it has bothered to flesh in the migration of Harry from the innocence of Lovett in *Barbary Shore* to the savage savvy of Rojack, that American Dreamer. And I can't help identifying with a character in DeLillo's *White Noise*, the ex-wife of the professor of Hitler Stud-

The story only he could tell

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

THE AUGUST COUP

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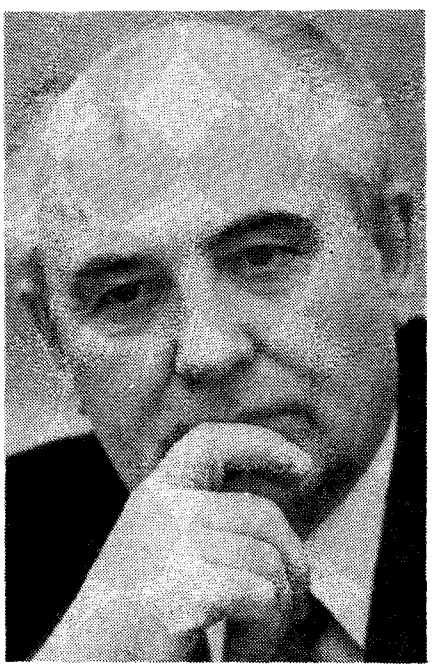

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ies, whose job it is to review books for the C.I.A., "mainly long serious novels with coded structures."

Curiously, yet logically, there is one vice . . . that tempts both narcissist and psychopath. It is treachery. —Kittredge

I like Modene more than Kittredge, who is Omega to Harry's Alpha. Besides being a tease, Kittredge is snotty. She hates Lenny Bruce, makes fun of A.J. Ayer and condescends to Freud. Harry has his doubts about her, too, wondering if she began her affair with him "because she wanted to learn whether she could run an operation under [Harlot's] nose and get away with it."

This cross-referencing of sex and espionage is one of the novel's principal conceits. Harlot tells his boys: "Our studies move into penetralia. We search for the innermost sanctum, 'the shuddery penetralia of caves.' " The old Orgone Boxer is asking us to think of spies as voyeurs; of the double-backed beast as another double agent; of adultery as a sort of treason; of sex itself as quest and conspiracy, guerrilla warfare and the coup d'état. Our behavior in history has a lot to do with our behavior in bed. Politics is a sex crime. Imperialism is a gang bang.

Sex can also be divine: Coupling with Kittredge, Harry tells us, is a "sacrament," letting him "see God when the lightning flashed and we jolted our souls into one another." And sex, of course, is death: Harry smells "the whiff of murder beyond every embrace of love": Sam and Modene even make it in a graveyard, on top of his dead wife's mausoleum.

It seems to me that the trouble with sex as the ground of being is that it puts too much of a burden on sex; we all still have to go to work in the morning, even spies. But I'm not ready yet to discuss Mailer and sex. That comes last. What about Alpha and Omega?

Well, according to Kittredge, they aren't metaphors. They are, in each of us, separate unconsciousnesses, with their own egos and superegos. Alpha is our male component, "creature of the forward-swimming energies of sperm, ambitious, blind to all but its own purposes . . . more oriented toward enterprise, technology, grinding the corn, repairing the mill, building the bridges between money and power, *und so weiter*." Whereas Omega, our female component, "originated in the ovum and so knows more about the mysteries—conception, birth, death, night, the moon, eternity, karma, ghosts, divinities, myths, magic, our primitive past, so on."

In other words, double the trouble and goose the guilt, but also someone else to blame it on when things go wrong. What isn't right-brained/left-brained in all this, or gussied-up Carl Jung, or old-fashioned schizophrenia, seems, as so often happens when the vapors take Mailer, to be a kind of Trojan zebra, foisting more of his Manichean dualisms on the unwary reader—courage and fear, sex and death, Alpha and Omega, Simon and Garfunkel—the way Aristotle once foisted the unconscious dualisms of Greek grammar on an unsuspecting cosmos.

What the hey. If Yeats can believe in faeries, Pound in funny money, Doris Lessing in flying saucers and Saul Bellow in Rudolph Steiner, the old Rosicrucian has a right to his Alphas and Omegas, however much they remind me of Randall Jarrell on W.H. Auden: "The theological ideas which Auden does not adopt but invents are all too often on the level of those brown paper parcels, brought secretly to the War Department in times of national emergency, which turn out to be full of plans to destroy enemy submarines by tracking them down with seals."

But Mailer, as usual, is out to get Freud. Freud, says the insufferable Kittredge, "really had no more philosophy than a Stoic. That's not enough. Stoics make good plumbers. The drains go bad and you've got to hold your nose and fix them. End of Freud's philosophy. If people and civilization don't fit—which we all know anyway—why, says Freud, make the best of a bad lot."

This is bumptious. It omits, among many other important matters, Freud's tragic pessimism. Okay, the guy was saying that civilization depends on a certain amount of repression of the instincts, and Mailer would like us to think that he operates entirely on instinct, so he's bound to resent this bad news, as well as civilization, at least since the Enlightenment. (Mailer belongs, in fact, to Isaiah Berlin's team of anti-Enlightenment "swimmers against the current," like Vico and Hamann and Herder, like Moses Hess and Georges Sorel.) But you'd think that as much as he identified in *Ancient Evenings* with Menenhetet on the Boat of Ra, he'd identify even more with a brave pariah who dropped by bathysphere *into himself* to see why people hurt the way they do; the dream-decoder; the first deconstructionist. Isn't this Mailer's own detective method, a consulting of the suspect self, plowing

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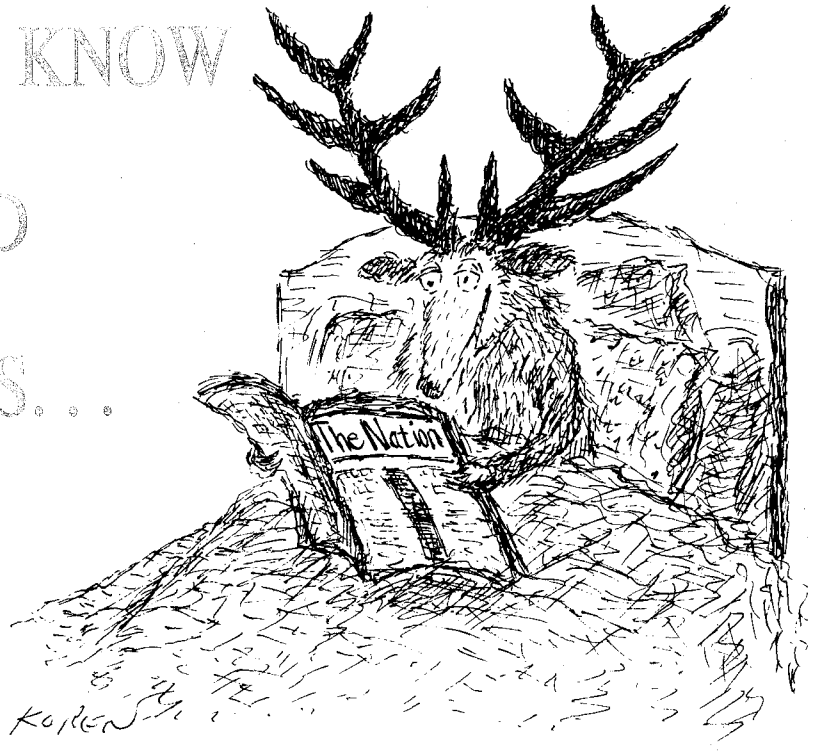

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through magnetic fields, lighting up the wounds of God?

Besides, Harry in *Harlot's Ghost* has to kill off two fathers.

I wish the old Cabalist had spent less time thinking about Hemingway, and no time writing about Marilyn, and some years working through Freud, after which he could take on Marx, thus killing off, instead of kissing off, both *his* fathers. (Anyway, if Jean-Paul Sartre could churn out 800 pages on Freud when John Huston asked him for a screenplay, think what Mailer might have managed, especially with his old buddy Montgomery Clift as Sigmund.) Nor has he really ever answered the shrewd question put to him by an interviewer in *Pieces and Pontifications*: "Why can't the unconscious be as error prone as the conscious?"

Just because Kittredge has ghost sex with the pirate-shade of Augustus Farr, who "submitted me to horrors," doesn't mean Harry has to heed her every fatuity. He's better off listening to Chevi Fuentes. Among other good advices, Fuentes warns Harry against the labyrinth-maker Jorge Luis Borges: "Never read him. In five pages, in any of his five pages, he will summarize for you the meaninglessness of the next ten years of your life. Your life, particularly."

Capitalism, says Fuentes, "is essentially psychopathic." It

> lives for the moment. It can plan far ahead only at the expense of its own vitality, and all larger questions of morality are delegated to patriotism, religion, or psychoanalysis. "That is why I am a capitalist," he says. "Because I am a psychopath. Because I am greedy. Because I want instant consumer satisfaction. If I have spiritual problems, I either go to my priest and obtain absolution, or I pay an analyst to convince me over the years that my greed is my identity and I have rejoined the human race. I may feel bad about my selfishness, but I will get over it. Capitalism is a profound solution to the problem of how to maintain a developed society. It recognizes the will-to-power in all of us."

Chevi used to be a Communist back in Montevideo, before Harry "turned" him. By the time he tells Harry that he's a capitalist, in Miami, Chevi has also become a homosexual. Listen up:

> You are so naïve. Prodigiously naïve, but you try to run the world. . . . You will judge me adversely for being a homosexual, yet it is you who is more of one than any of us, although you will never admit it to yourself because you never practice! You are a homosexual the way Americans are barbarians although they do not practice openly. They go to church. And you work for your people so that you will not have to scrutinize yourself in the mirror.

Our Harry? What's going on? Sure, Kittredge is a drag. Still, isn't there Modene? But something, at the very least androgynous, seems to have happened to Mailer since he came back from Egypt. If you used to worry about his preoccupation with anal sex, as we all of course have worried about Updike's preoccupation with oral sex, you are entitled to worry even more.

In Berlin in 1956, after taking him to a seedy S/M bar where the house specialty is "the golden shower," Dix Butler, Agency *Übermensch*, makes a pass at Harry. Harry declines this invitation, not because he isn't excited but because he fears such an act would oblige him to "live forever on this side of sex." Dix goes both ways, we are told, because he was raped as a child by his brother. But later it's clear that Arnie Rosen, another of Harry's schoolmates in Langley's entering class of 1955, is also gay, and by choice, though forced in the fifties to be furtive.

This isn't to suggest that the C.I.A. goes in for ritual pederasty—as seems to have been the case among Spartans, Celts and the Sambia of New Guinea, if you believe Rick Fields in *The Code of the Warrior*—though it's not hard to imagine, at the Agency, as in prep school, a homoerotic bonding of the blue-eyed boys, reading their spagyrics and their necromantiums, pulling on their Tomar Towers and their Luxor Obelisks, speaking their Vattan cryptosystems. To join the eighteenth-century Bavarian Illuminati, you underwent a trial by a knife. Their candles were black, their hoods were white and they bound up your testicles with a poppy-colored cordon: standard Skull and Bones hot stuff. However, I digress.

No. Mailer evokes the fugitive sensibility as yet another metaphor for the secret life: undercover, as it were; the double or fictitious identity. But think for a minute about Chevi. In being "turned," wasn't he raped, like Dix? And hasn't he seen Harry in action on another front, too, smitten by the notorious prostitute Libertad, who turns out to be a hermaphrodite? And suddenly one begins to wonder what all these men, like STONEHENGE and RAPUNZEL, are really up to. And I must explain the Tequila Sunrise Paradigm.

In the movie *Tequila Sunrise*, Mel Gibson and Kurt Russell are high school buddies who grew up on opposite sides of the law. They compete for Michelle Pfeiffer. If not to them, what's clear to us is that Gibson and Russell really want to go to bed with each other. Since they can't, they go to bed with Pfeiffer. She's the go-between, the trampoline, a universal joint, a portable gopher-hole, a surrogate and a Chinese finger puzzle. Once you have seen it in the movie, you'll see it everywhere. In Pynchon's *Vineland*, for instance, it's obvious that Vond, the fascistic prosecutor, is murmuring to Zoyd, the rock piano player, through the holes in poor Frenesi's body. The Tequila Sunrise

THE COALITION

If among earth's kings Lord Gilgamesh should remain unreasonable,
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Sir Agamemnon will assemble a diligent Protestant coalition

to administer death as appropriate lesson and punishment.
We'll station right-thinking King Herod with his updated hoplites
backed by Xin the Emperor's deathless terracotta battalions

beside Mercury, Mars, and Athena from the province of Olympus
to institute, as a deterrent, termination with extreme prejudice.
Young Colonel Bonaparte, upgrading to Alexander, will distribute

slaughter by African blowguns, phalanxes, tortoises from Cipango,
whinnying helicopters from Attila's stables, Cyclopean missiles,
and Greek fire to melt Saracens flourishing their scimitars.

If Lord Gilgamesh should remain unreasonable, we will coalesce
to incinerate retreating Uruki soldiers, furthering the project
of Pharaoh Death, Imperator Death, Shogun Death, President Death.

Donald Hall

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Israel Expropriates Homes of Arab Citizens While Requesting U.S. Loan Guarantees for Immigrant Housing

Village Voice, 9/11/91 - "While the debate over [West Bank settlement] rages, the Israeli government has been swallowing up Arab land within its 1967 borders. In June, the Arab villagers in the Galilee town of Ramya were issued a court order ... to vacate their land."

Washington Post, 10/5/91 - "Their [homes]... and olive groves will be bulldozed to make way for the construction of a new neighborhood for Soviet Jewish immigrants."

New York Times, 10/2/91 - "The Ramya dispute marks perhaps the first time in this migration that Government officials are on record as saying that the Soviet immigrants and other Jewish newcomers have priority over longtime Arab residents."

Ha'Aretz, Israeli Daily, 8/9/91 - "[Knesset member] Shulamit Aloni has demanded that the Lands Administration find a way to prevent the uprooting of the residents of Ramya from their homes and birthplace ... Aloni said that the Arab residents of the village are citizens of the state, living in their homes by right of purchase, and that the very idea of confiscating their houses and property, in order to replace them with Jews, is nothing other than apartheid and theft by the authorities."

"'Are we any less citizens than the immigrants?' one Ramya resident asked."

The Ramya villagers have obtained an emergency court order which expires on Nov. 24th. To keep the bulldozers away, IT IS CRUCIAL FOR AMERICANS TO EXERT PRESSURE NOW.

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Paradigm might even explain serial killers like Bateman in *American Psycho*, unless you believe that when yuppie Bateman rapes the Aspen waitress with the can of hair spray, nails Bethany's fingers to the hardwood floor and sodomizes a severed head, he is really criticizing late capitalism and the fetishism of commodities. (And I'm the King of Bavaria.)

Now take a look at the relationships in *Harlot's Ghost*, not just between Harlot and Harry and Kittredge and Dix, or Dix and Harry and Chevi and Modene, or Modene, Jack, Frank and Marilyn, but, let's say, *historically*. Just suppose that Sam Giancana really wanted to go to bed with Frank Sinatra, and Sinatra wanted to go to bed with Jack Kennedy, and Kennedy wanted to go to bed with everybody, including that "beautiful animal," Fidel Castro. And Marilyn and Modene (or Judith) were the closest they could get—except, of course, for an invasion. There is no question, even in the pages of Arthur Schlesinger Jr., that the Kennedy boys had a hard-on for Castro.

Talk about spooky. It shudders the penetralia of caves. Whatever else he's done or failed to do in *Harlot's Ghost*, Mailer—our very own Knight-Errant, Don Quixote, Tripmaster Monkey, Zapata and Scaramouche—has at last made the personal political. Which leads one to wonder whether, all this time, he's really wanted to play ball with Arthur Miller and Joe DiMaggio. □

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PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

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Central to her analysis is the premise that the "primary importance of affirmative action lies in its effectiveness as a remedy for institutional racism, by which race-neutral policies and practices can lead to the exclusion of blacks." This, of course, places her squarely at odds with the prevailing sentiment of the Reagan-Bush era, during which governmental data-gathering on racial disparity has all but disappeared. "Disparate impact" has been redefined as simply the groupthink of losers, and lots of people have trouble seeing race-neutrality as anything other than, well, neutral—even when it blindsides whole populations.

Ezorsky backs up her argument with compelling numbers: 86 percent of available jobs are advertised not in the classifieds but by word of mouth. "Lacking ties to whites as family, friends, fellow students, neighbors, or club members, blacks tend to be isolated from the networks in which connections to desirable employment—where whites predominate—are forged." This situation, she argues, perpetuates segregation almost as effectively as if Jim Crow were still the law. While this sort of negative impact can only be proved as a statistical matter rather than individually, a remedy is imperative because those statistics represent "real persons still suffering the effects of racist injury."

In response to those who would argue that disparate-impact litigation holds no guarantee that every individual beneficiary of such litigation will actually have suffered the alleged loss, she makes an analogy to veterans, some of whom "gained, on the whole, from military life: placed in noncombat units, they often learned a valuable skill. Yet no one proposes that for this reason veteran preference be abandoned." Moreover, "Veterans who enjoy hiring, promotion and security preference are surely not the very same individuals who, absent their military service, would have qualified for the positions they gained by such preference."

Ezorsky also addresses the frequent homilies, from Thomas Sowell's to Nathan Glazer's, about ethnic white European immigrants being able to employ themselves profitably and assimilate successfully. "For many such whites eviction of a black worker from a job was the beginning of upward mobility," driving blacks "out of railroads, streetcars, construction, and shipbuilding" and "out of their jobs as wagon and coach drivers, house painters, tailors, longshore workers, brick layers, and waiters." She documents the way in which recent migration to the United States has been "highly selective, bringing in skilled, educated persons, among whom are scientists, engineers, doctors, and academics," creating not only an international brain drain but myths of Asian and West Indian superiority. Ezorsky reminds her readers of the far more numerous unskilled and uneducated Chinese workers, for example, who labor for wretched wages in ghettos across the country; and of the fact that "in New York City a native white male college graduate can expect to earn 50 percent more than an equally educated black male of West Indian ancestry. In the South a native white male high school graduate can expect to earn 60 percent more than an equally educated black of West Indian descent."

By comparison, Stephen Carter's *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* is considerably harder to summarize. Indeed, part of its premise is the rejection of easy labels. Carter doesn't like the term "black conservative"; he yearns instead for something more complex: "unpredictable," "intellectual," "best," "professional" are just some of the hats he tries on in the course of this book. If I had to come up with some of my own, I would add: committed centrist, steady pendulum (right on this issue, left on that, right on this issue, left on that . . .).

If Carter has no real bottom line, it is clear that the idea for which this book is already most remembered is its rejection of affirmative action. He is most often cited for his characterization of affirmative action as helping only those middle- and upper-class blacks who don't need help; as being a feel-good substitute for programs to help those whom William Julius Wilson calls the "truly disadvantaged"; and as actually perpetuating the stigma of black inferiority. Yet Carter never fully or convincingly addresses the sort of hard data that Ezorsky brings to her case for affirmative action. He never deals with or even admits the enormous transformations that affirmative action programs have wrought in just a few decades: the integration of police and fire de-

Patricia J. Williams teaches at the University of Wisconsin Law School. She is the author of The Alchemy of Race and Rights *(Harvard).*

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partments, unions, factories, offices and schools, as well as the professions. One of Carter's main contentions, in other words—that affirmative action has helped only a narrow upper-class elite—is simply *not true*.

To the extent that the social conditions of blacks still leave much to be desired, Ezorsky and Carter split radically: Ezorsky sees a massive social commitment yet to be recognized ("Whites have eleven times the wealth of blacks per capita"); Carter sees an intangible attitude that only intense individualistic "best effort" can counter. Ezorsky cautions that if affirmative action "cannot help those so destroyed as to be incapable of any work or on-the-job training, who require other compensatory race-specific rehabilitation programs," then "the claim that unemployable blacks are most deserving does not imply that employable blacks fail to deserve any—or even a great deal of—compensation." Where Carter invokes Wilson's job-expansion proposal as an alternative to affirmative action, Ezorsky observes: "Before bus desegregation, blacks could occupy only a relatively small number of seats in the back of the bus; hence they often had to stand. If there were more buses, blacks would have gained more seats, but Wilson certainly would not have advocated building more buses as a substitute for desegregation, that is, as a substitute for racial justice. Let us then not conceive expansion in the number of jobs as a substitute for racial justice in the workplace."

Beyond their substance, these two books are worlds apart stylistically. Ezorsky's is a concise, classically ordered philosophical response, with an appendix of well-chosen documentation, easily readable at one sitting; Carter's is considerably denser, and quite a bit more convoluted in the way it sometimes subtly pits personal and political reality against each other, where one might expect them to be aligned.

Carter's story begins with being raised as a Cornell "fac-brat," where he "hung out with a bunch of white Cornell kids in a private little world where we competed fiercely (but only with one another—no one else mattered!) for grades and test scores and solutions to brain teasers. We were the sort of kids other kids hated: the ones who would run around compiling lists of everyone else's test scores and would badger guidance counselors into admitting their errors in arithmetic (no computers then) in order to raise our class ranks a few notches. I held my own

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in this bunch, although I was forced by the norms of the fac-brat community to retake the Mathematics Level II achievement test to raise a humiliating score of 780 to an acceptable 800. (No one had yet told me that standardized tests were culturally biased against me.) Like the rest of the fac-brats, I yearned for the sobriquet 'brilliant,' and tried desperately to convince myself and everyone else who would listen that I had the grades and test scores to deserve it."

Stephen Carter doesn't want to be the "best black," in other words; he wants to be the best, period. And that is a quest that can kill you, whether you're black or white. While never acknowledging that he grew up in precisely that culture in *favor* of which standardized tests are biased, he does admit that racism makes black people's accomplishments doubly hard to see, and he ends up accepting that time-honored parental advice that blacks have to work "twice as hard" to make it in the world. I heard that advice from my parents, and my grandparents too, and yes, I suppose it kept them afloat through the hardest of times. But we can't work twice as hard all the time, without dying at half the age of our white counterparts; and isn't having to work twice as hard exactly what defined our forebears' second-class citizenship? Nor is it clear that even the most adrenaline-inspired of work ethics can adjust for statistics like those 1980 figures, cited in Ezorsky's book, showing that "blacks with college educations had a higher unemployment rate than did white high-school dropouts."

Carter clearly works twice as hard as your average perfectionist, driven, honor student—and still manages to feel only about half as good about himself as the average neurotic Yale law professor. Moreover, in a world where respect for blacks is too often premised on exceptionalizing them—by making them "special" or different from the "typical" messy masses—it is troubling to see Carter make an ideology of "best"-ing-or-bust as the only path to success. His persistent incantation that "we have to adapt ourselves" to the world even if it's unjust goes well beyond simply wanting to *do* one's best; it goes well beyond pragmatism or apoliticism or even cynicism. He pursues it to the extent of full-fledged intellectual bulimia—Carter spends chapter after chapter spitting out his own achievements and then trying to figure out how to do better than *that*.

Indeed, he theorizes that competent blacks are often *overvalued* because affirmative action so prepares whites for less-than-competence that they are surprised to see a black who can do anything at all. Would that it were so. Aside from an anecdote about a math teacher who made the terrible mistake of thinking more of Carter than he did of himself, there is simply no evidence that this is true in the world at large. Moreover, the sense of unworthiness that permeates so much of Carter's thinking might be well informed by Ezorsky's observation that, "like veterans, Holocaust survivors and victims of industrial accidents," blacks deserve to be compensated for the grievous wrongs of racism, "have no good reason to feel unworthy" and "should be respected for the[ir] achievement." And to the extent that affirmative action taxes some white men (it has helped white women), Ezorsky suggests not that it be abandoned, as Carter does, but that measures such as job sharing and subsidies be created "to reduce the price of such preference for white candidates and to spread the burden of payment as widely as possible."

One of the most disconcerting and infuriating aspects of Carter's book is his

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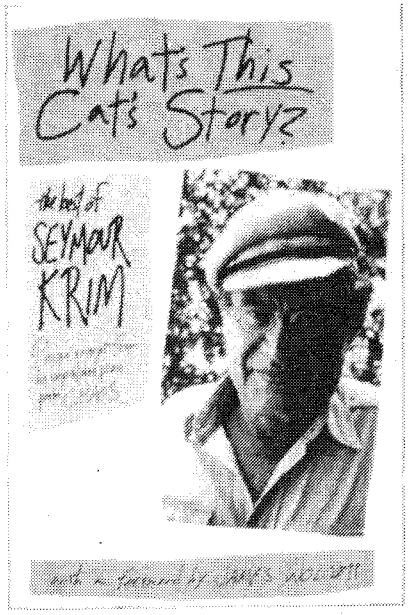

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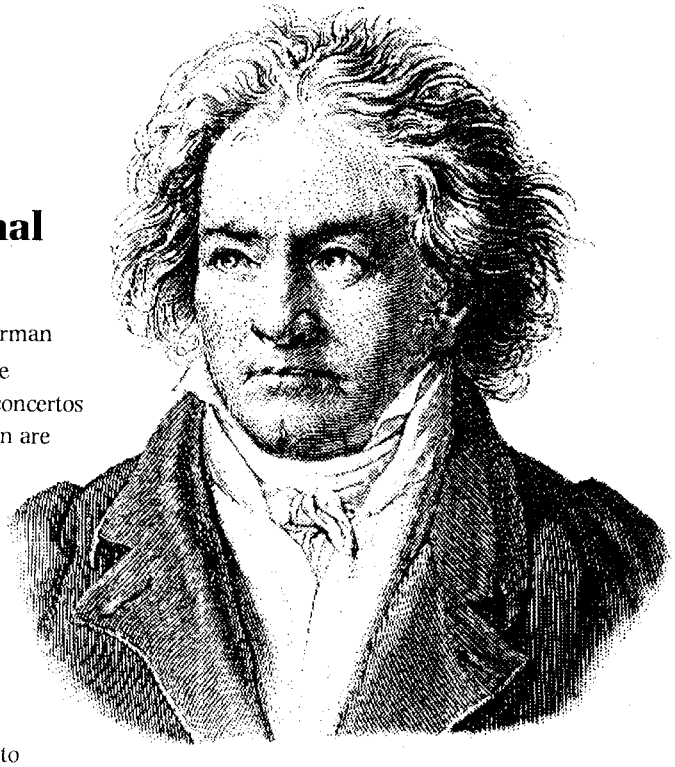
tendency to disparage without citation various unidentified black left intellectuals. Thus, "the diversity movement" becomes an anonymous *lumpen* source of such foolishness as "the circumvent[ion] or eradicat[ion of] standards" or the insistence "that our specialness in effect *adds value* to us in a way that the specialness of other people does not" or the proposition "that we ought to make a contest of suffering." The utter lack of reference to specific authors or proponents of this brand of supposed diversity makes the charges especially hard to respond to. It's as though all Carter has read of the diversity movement is right-wing literature (he relentlessly cites almost everyone who has ever been associated with the Hoover Institution or the Heritage Foundation, from John Bunzel to Clarence Thomas, from Glenn Loury to Thomas Sowell) about what demagogic fools those on the left are, and, based on this, rebukes diversity for its fatal folly.

"The idea of difference, and its importance," he says, "has been worked out more fully by feminist scholars than by those propounding what might be called the racial critique." He then attributes to "feminists" a crude form of crudest Gilliganism, which by the next paragraph is bastardized yet further by unnamed race theoreticians: "The difference approach proposes, for example, that writers who are white and writers who are not are on opposite sides of an unbridgeable chasm . . . that . . . a shared understanding is virtually impossible." Carter comes very close to co-optation of what he refers to as "the racial critique" while relegating those associated with it to the fringes, chiding them for the right's opinion of them while holding up an instructional model that is little more than a hugely modified version of their own best arguments.

Furthermore, Carter expresses a rather exaggerated sense of mistreatment at the hands of other blacks who disagree with him; he has a tendency to turn the disinterest of those black intellectuals who are engaged in thought or research light years away from his own into *their* dismissal of him personally, into *their* conspiratorial reluctance or refusal to engage in protracted and well-modulated debate with him, into *their* failure of what he calls "group love." But there is no black conspiracy against Stephen Carter or other black conservatives, no "whispering campaign," no sub rosa verbal execution. It's not exactly a secret that there are some of us who question a lot of his premises, but, after all, that's what polite disagreement is all about.

Throughout his book, Carter assumes many *gestures* of solidarity premised on a professed willingness to listen (without the activity of argumentation) and on the ideal of restrained conversation (but not the passion of committed beliefs, perspectives, differences). According to Carter, the whole problem with the civil rights movement is that it just isn't *civil* anymore. He has a fantasy "that for an instant the passions would be stilled, because then, finally, our mutually exclusive monologues might end and genuine dialogue might at last begin. Sometimes I even have childish daydreams: Thomas Sowell and Derrick Bell shaking hands across the conference table; Julius Lester and Jesse Jackson breaking bread together; Glenn Loury and Benjamin Hooks sitting down to thrash out their differences." But this "passion"-less "thrash"-ing is a naïve vision precisely because it values the *image* of community and does not take seriously those whose beliefs represent principled visions of society that are nevertheless very



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much at odds with one another.

More important, those with whom Carter would engage in such discussion are consistently described as "untutored," irrational, morally ridiculous and defensive. On too many occasions in this book, Carter turns his disagreement with others into *their* disagreeability. For example, he begins one chapter with an engaging scene in which Yale Law School students are gathered on his hearth enjoying "eggnog, a blazing fire and quiet music." At first he describes his sense of "deep emotional connection to them" and being able to "look at their youthful enthusiastic faces" and see himself. (Only 35 himself, Carter frequently speaks in the Indulgent Avuncular, as though his own youth were far, far away in some long-forgotten past.) By the next page, a little negativity begins to creep in: Some of the students hold ideas that are "not only wrong but a little silly," "disturbing," "weakly conceived" and the product of "cloud[ed] analytical faculties." Some of his colleagues warn him that "the students and their ideas are actually dangerous," but Carter, setting himself up like Candide, counters that the "students are young, their minds are growing, they are testing theses and will ultimately reject most of them—as we did. So my wife and I continue to host our party, continue to engage them in discussion, and continue not to worry too much."

Within the next two paragraphs, in a deft rhetorical slippage, he substitutes the "current leaders of the black community" for the fragile future that the students, those impressionable young leaders of tomorrow, represent. "It may be that we should worry a little more," he muses. And with that slippage, the world quite suddenly becomes a full-blown nightmare, one in which Stephen Carter becomes a lonely heroic dissenter from the civil rights "agenda," one of a small company of elite knights facing "righteous fury," the "sacrifice" of one's birthright of blackness, "loyalty tests," "ostracism, expulsion, official death," "purge," "ruthless" "elimination," "denial of the right to think," "vilification," "disdain," "stinging rebuke," "exile," "abuse," "mockery" and "vitriolic" "intimidation." This "purging" to which Carter claims that he and a handful of other black conservatives have been subjected is actually compared with everything from the battle between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites to "the Un-American Activities investigations of the 1950s" to the suppressions of "the old Soviet state." By chapter's end, in other words, he is in quite a lather over the way in which "mainstream" blacks purportedly see *him* as dangerous—him, whose dearest endeavor is merely "encouraging open and robust debate" so that "we can march upward toward a better tomorrow."

Yet the evidence that Carter marshals of this horrific assault mistakes behavior ranging from impertinence to outright bad manners—as when Amiri Baraka called Shelby Steele "a basket case," or when Ben Hooks described Glenn Loury's views as "treasonous"—for state-sponsored oppression. And the hyperbole of words like "purge" to describe his abundantly blessed situation seems particularly absurd given the fact that an Op-Ed essay adapted from this mass-marketed book was published in *The New York Times*; and given that it has become almost impossible to pick up a newspaper or turn on the television without seeing Stephen Carter broadcasting how silenced he is.

This paradoxical positioning, this rhetoric of reversal, is a consistent feature of Carter's thinking. His arguments assume an artificial frame in which black power looms larger than life. It is thus perhaps that he can characterize the leaders of the civil rights community as a monolithic "mainstream," or so numerous as to have imposed the tyrannical constraints of groupthink on anything at all. It is only against this limited and imagined backdrop that he has any chance of characterizing himself as a "dissenter." And perhaps it is thus that Carter, citing Russell Baker, believes that "racism" has become the "Communism" of the nineties. If, on the other hand, one enlarges the frame to the reality of the United States in 1991 and its current political climate, Stephen Carter is deeply conventional, subsidized by the most powerful educational and media institutions in the world, and just about as mainstream as mainstream could ever hope to be.

A large part of Carter's argument rests on the psychological damage—the self-doubt of blacks, the resentment of whites—that he feels affirmative action engenders. He tells moving stories about his experiences with affirmative action programs that were administered so patronizingly as to make the most qualified beneficiaries want to rage, choke, spit or cry. But that, as Ezorsky points out, has

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more to do with racism's long history of insulting condescension than with affirmative action per se. It does not amount to an argument against affirmative action; quite the opposite. The same beliefs were hard at work long before such programs existed, when Harvard and The Citadel admitted blacks only when they didn't know they were black, and then tormented them to convince them how much happier they would be elsewhere. In chapter two of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, for example, a group of young black students win prizes offered by a white gentlemen's club for their exceptional accomplishments in English composition. When they arrive to claim their awards, they are made to strip down and box one another, to scramble for gold tokens, to grovel and entertain before they will be "recognized" for their intellect. By the time they are told to read their compositions, the scholastic endeavor has become just another part of a physicalized minstrel show. They are reduced to pet freaks with big, bulging muscles and big, overdeveloped brains.

But the problem in Ellison's story is not the rewarding of the black students; the problem is the ritual of dehumanization with which it is surrounded. Similarly, it is not the rewards of affirmative action that we need to be destroying but the mocking, self-fulfilling deprecation with which it is too often administered. That Carter, for all his keen intelligence and genuine amiability, could still feel as lonely as he does is at least in part a testament to how truly and suffocatingly segregated the professions still are for any black, conservative or not. Very few of us escape that sense of isolation, the sad impossibility of our pseudo-assimilation. As Ezorsky points out, "Blacks constitute over 50 percent of the nation's maids and garbage collectors, but only 4 percent of its managers and 3 percent of its physicians and lawyers."

The same myths of inferiority that kept us on the outside in Ellison's time are the myths that today convince even some blacks that we are too inferior to be on the inside. The myths are misery-making; but not only would I rather be miserable on the inside, it is only by lots of us being on the inside that we can finally become Stephen Carter's longed-for community. And it is only by having lots of us on the inside that all of us, black and white, can begin the next step in the legacy of the civil rights movement—debunking interactively not just the myth of black inferiority that exists

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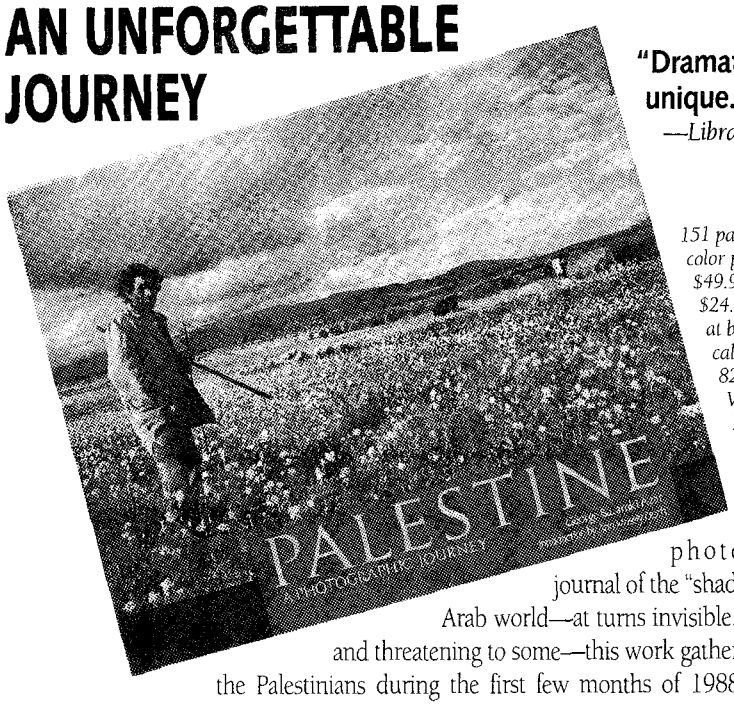

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in white minds but most particularly the myth of white superiority in black minds: the humiliated, internalized self-deprecation that drives so many "first" and truly best blacks into stern, isolated, perfectionist tailspins. □

Sex and the Single Novel

DAVID KAUFMAN

MATING. *By Norman Rush. Knopf. 477 pp. $23.*

> In Africa, you want more, I think.
>
> People get avid. This takes different forms in different people, but it shows up in some form in everyone who stays there any length of time. It can be sudden. I include myself.
>
> Obviously I mean whites in Africa and not black Africans. The average black African has the opposite problem: he or she doesn't want enough.

Thus begins *Mating*, a brash monologue as much as anything, which sustains its remarkably ironic voice for 477 dense pages. Although the narrator of this brilliant first novel by Norman Rush remains nameless, by the time she refers to herself as Scientiae Athena, near the end of her breathless account, we're apt to grant her the grandiose conceit behind such an appellation. Some might even be tempted to allow that Rush has come damn close to creating "the most fully realized female character in the English language," which is how, while acknowledging his "hubris," he has summarized his ambition.

Rush's narrator, with her distinctively deadpan tone, has in fact shown up before, in "Bruns," the first of the half-dozen stories that make up *Whites*, his well-received story collection of 1986. That tale circumscribes a rather preposterous duel in which the eponymous protagonist is ultimately murdered by a boorish Boer, who suspects Bruns of philandering with his wife. This put-down of a silly macho world reads, in retrospect, like a preliminary survey of the far more complex terrain of *Mating*.

Mating is justifiably being welcomed as a tour de force by literary cognoscenti, and it has just been nominated for a National Book Award for fiction. In his rave for *The New York Review of Books*, Thomas R. Edwards compares the narrator's voice to nothing less than Walt Whitman's and Huck Finn's; John Updike told *New Yorker* readers that he heard echoes of Ahab. But in terms of Rush's larger aims and his thorough conception of a self-contained utopian community, *Mating* could be viewed as a contemporary, politically motivated *Lost Horizon* written by Mary McCarthy.

Set in Botswana in the early eighties, *Mating* uses the apartheid upheavals just south of the border in South Africa as a powerful subtext to all that unfolds. (Nor are we ever permitted to forget that Reagan is just seizing power on the other side of the globe.) Given the emphasis on feminist interests throughout the narrative, as well as certain developments in the story, Rush seems to be implying that feminism's impact has enforced an apartheid of a different stripe.

As the book opens, the 32-year-old narrator is looking back over a year or so to 1980, when she was compelled to abandon her doctoral thesis in nutritional anthropology after eighteen months of field research had demonstrated that "gathering was a dead issue in my part of the bush. Normal-type food seems to have percolated everywhere . . . people were getting regular canned food and cornflakes, or getting relief food, sorghum and maize, from the World Food Program. So nobody bothered with gathering much, and I had an exploded thesis on my hands."

From the arch opening, it's instantly hard to determine who is the more ferociously cynical, our Athena or her author. But it's the unspoken tension between the two of them that makes *Mating* such an invigorating, albeit tricky, read. The narrative emphasis, however, is on Athena's relationship with one Nelson Denoon, roughly fifteen years her senior. A god by any other name, incontestably a genius and an Adonis to boot, Denoon has written a classic book in the field, *Development as the Death of Villages*, and he was someone the narrator had always wanted to meet:

> He was so interdisciplinary! Economics, anthropology, economic anthropology, you name it in the policy sciences, not to mention development proper and being in actual charge of a sequence of famous rural development projects in Africa! . . . For some reason he had basically a left academic constituency, which was odd because he was notorious for taking the position that Marxists had no development theory worth the name: from Lenin onward development was just whatever took place after the spokesmen for the proletariat took power. But still they loved him. How did they like his famous Capitalism is strangling black Africa: Socialism will bury her! I wondered. He was the theorist you hate to love . . . the equivalent in development terms of Orson Welles in the movie world when he was at his zenith between *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*. . . . I wanted to see him in the flesh.

What follows, of course, is the narrator's negotiating a love affair with Denoon, played out in Tsau, an isolated community Denoon established a decade earlier in the middle of the Kalahari Desert, to be run by and for destitute African women. Known as a Solar Democracy, Tsau was designed "to demonstrate that at least here something could be done about the economic disenfranchisement of women that was taking place in the society at large as it modernized." In keeping with such intentions, Denoon's original charter guarantees that only women can be property owners in Tsau.

Unlike Shangri-La, Tsau emerges as a rigorously plausible society. All aspects of life there are observed with careful details and a credible depth, which clearly draw on Rush's five years' experience as co-director of the Peace Corps in Botswana, but just as obviously entail a marvelous capacity for invention. The story is peppered, for example, with sessions of the "mother committee," essentially a town council, and with "summarists," whose job it is to read to work groups while they're laboring: Austen, Kafka, Dickens, Thoreau, Yeats and Edwin Muir are among those mentioned in this context.

One of the more elaborate if typically sarcastic notions concerns protocol in small group meetings in Tsau. Whenever participants want to turn the discussion into English, they link their little fingers together to indicate the desire. But others retain the "option of signaling no with thumbs-down." And then there's "corso, which was the correct term for the postprandial walking around and going into houses where the welcome light was on that [Denoon] had inculcated in Tsau.

David Kaufman, theater critic of Downtown, *is at work on a biography of Charles Ludlam. His reviews appear frequently in* The New York Times Book Review *and* New York Newsday.

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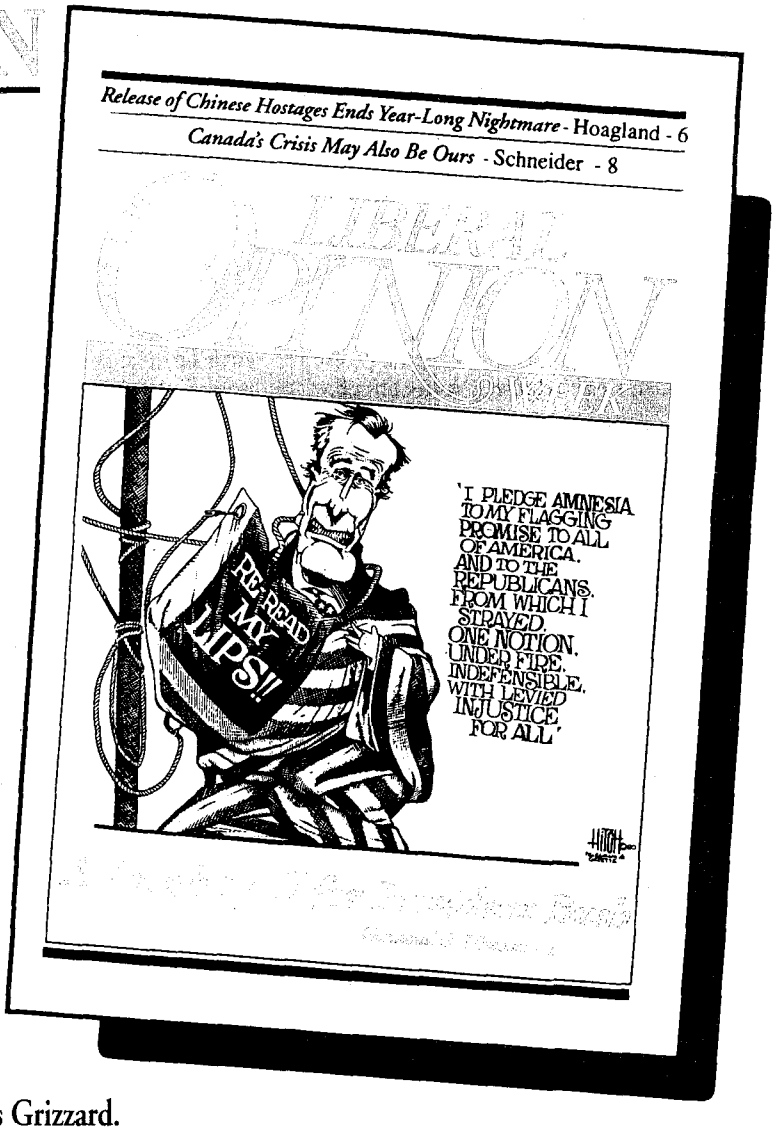
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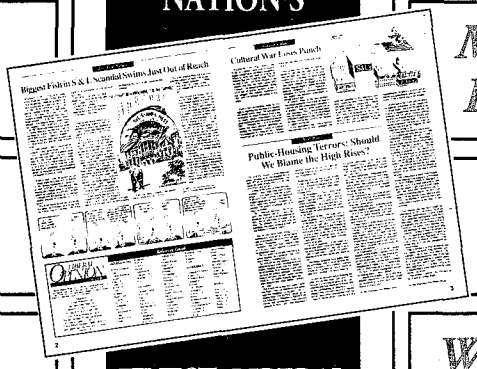
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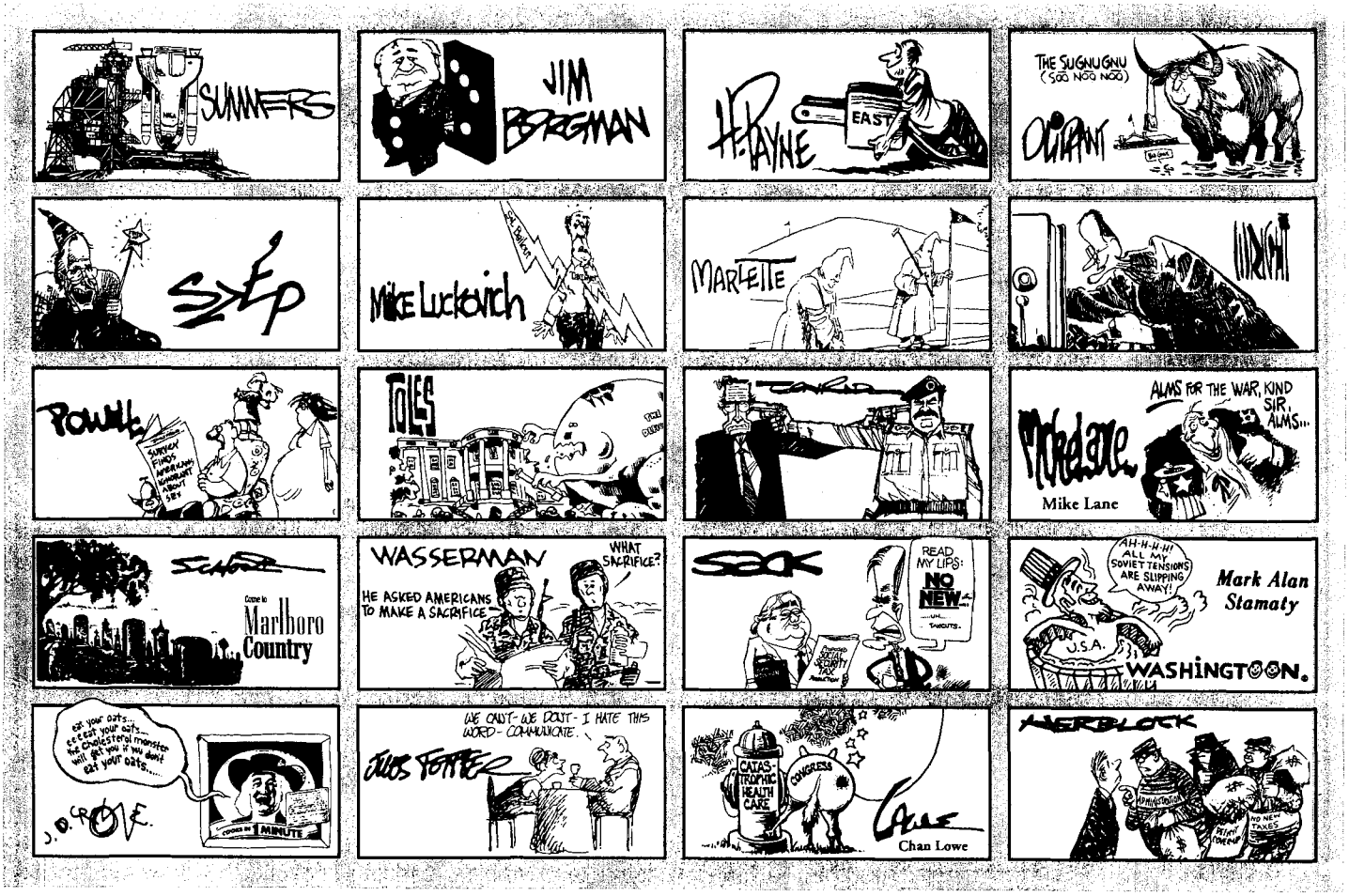

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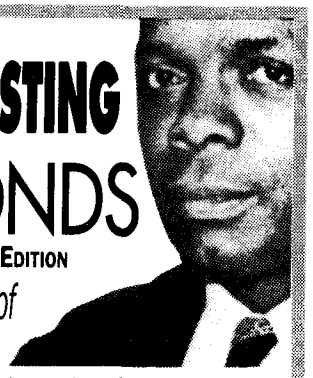

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He had gotten the idea for it out of Tolstoy's *Sevastopol Sketches*, he told me. It was apparently something done in Russian provincial towns during the nineteenth century, and it had seemed like a good idea, so why not?"

While *Mating* functions simultaneously as a compelling romance and as a dialectical novel of ideas, the narrative provides a continuous flood of esoteric information on every topic imaginable. Every convoluted perception or insight advanced by the narrator becomes an occasion for another bit of scholarly trivia. Like Denoon no less than the narrator—or Dr. Johnson and Boswell, which is yet another self-conscious motif—the book is itself encyclopedic on the natural and social sciences as well as on literature, art and popular culture. In addition to Tolstoy, Blake (Denoon's favorite) receives many relevant references—as do Rousseau, Bob Dylan and Boy George, whom we're told has the world's largest personal collection of crucifixes.

If anything, the biggest problem with *Mating* is that its two central figures are too smart for their own good. They're so politically correct and intellectually rendered that you might find them to be more sets of ideas than characters. But it is precisely there, where Rush's sincerity becomes suspect, that he divulges what may be a harbored contempt for his most stunning creations and that *Mating* comes into its own as a scathing commentary on the many "isms" it traffics in—feminism most of all.

For one thing, it is more than a little ironic that our narrator, posed on every page as the quintessential feminist, has finally met her match in Denoon, a male of the species who is even more pro-female and antimale than she is. But the plot, baldly stated, goes something like this: Archetypal feminist finds the world's perfect man, woos him, wins him, then rejects him. It is pointedly double-edged that at the climax of her story she is sent into turmoil when Denoon interrupts their otherwise ideal relationship by proposing marriage. Her reaction is nothing more than a straightforward reversal of a male chauvinist cliché. Unless, as the cumulative evidence and subtext also suggest, Denoon is truly a manipulator after all, who realized his proposal would send Athena heading for the hills—or back to America and the university circuit, as the case may be.

Once Athena has returned to the present, where the narrative begins,

> Being in America is like being stabbed to death with a butter knife by a weakling. Brazen Head [Denoon's name for Reagan] is the most popular president ever. People think I have very interesting political slants. So much is siphoned from Nelson, so how should this make me feel? I seem to be all things to all women. Feminists like me because of Tsau, socialist feminists like me because of the cooperative side of Tsau, professional women, nonsocialist feminists, like me because of the private property and incentive side of Tsau, and lesbians like me because I never go around with men. . . . The left is prolapsed, insofar as I can judge. I can't find an enemy in my milieu anywhere. If you have ideas that rise above Power to the people! you qualify as someone who should write a book for the Monthly Review Press.

As rich as Rush's narrative is on superficial levels, it offers its greatest rewards indirectly. Although far from obvious at first, *Mating* is a satirical con of sorts, a delicious comedy of manners that toys with its all-wise narrator in the way that Ford Madox Ford played tricks with his deluded egotist in *The Good Soldier.* Rush proves even more cynical than his narrator, which early on had hardly seemed possible. He emerges as a puppeteer pulling strings by inverting sexist roles, letting his readers draw the comparisons implicit in his characters' movements. The novel begins, for instance, as the narrator realizes how ineffectual her "exploded" thesis is, which is implicitly in contrast with the thesis of a man who built an effectively operational community where "the point was female equality and dignity if it was anything."

In one of numerous twists, Athena can't cope with "the new revised passive Denoon" in his response to a climactic internal rebellion at Tsau. This, too, suggests a disdain for the "female" qualities Denoon increasingly comes to manifest. As Athena had claimed earlier, there may be something to "Denoon's theory of the characterological collapse of the male in the Western world, America in particular. As women get stronger and more defined, men get more silly, violent, and erratic overall."

In Rush's most shameless coup, Denoon has a mystical conversion in the desert that becomes an unmistakable parody of the Gospels, comparing him to Christ. Following a metaphysical episode at Victoria Falls and the narrator's experience in the Kalahari on her initial trip to Tsau, we begin to recognize D.H. Law-

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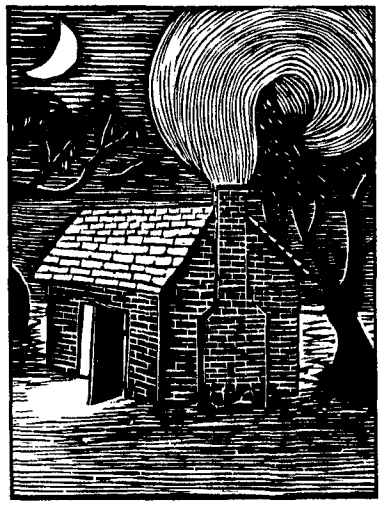
rence as an overwhelming influence on what Rush has written. Both in style and in content, from its circuitous verbosity and redundancy to its concern with utopian ideals and a perfect relationship between the sexes, *Mating* is a hip, updated version of Lawrence in drag.

Still, any robberies and trespasses are forgiven in light of Rush's beguiling narrator, a purely disarming literary confection that is bound to bewilder yet delight readers far into the future. The great conceit of this narrator and her jaded hindsight is that the book is constantly a running commentary on itself: "I don't know today if this is a parody of what [Denoon] said or not," she says, and it's likewise impossible to be sure of Rush's sincerity one way or the other. When the narrator attempts to come to terms with her ambivalence toward Denoon by writing a character analysis of him, she says, "Humor was tough for several reasons. Sometimes something I'd collected would seem to me to be humor and other times it would seem merely median sardonica. Did his singing go under Humor? He liked to sing a parody of The Impossible Dream, in which he ate the inedible meal and drank the unpotable beverage, and so on." Rush's wit is equally slippery and hard to brand. The novelist is of course both Denoon and his Boswell. But given the lack of resolution at the novel's end, this tells us little about where his sympathies ultimately reside.

Consider this characteristic passage: "Denoon was an answer to something I was only subliminally aware was really bothering me, namely the glut of things you feel you ought to have a perspective on." Rush's real achievement, given his own interdisciplinary grasp of things, is to have harnessed "the glut of things" that overwhelms the postmodern age to a narrative end, to have tamed it all in a quasi-instructive, decidedly amusing perspective sandwiched between two covers. As the debate over the canon rages on, Communist regimes fall the world over and the sexual divide has proved too wide to prevent the shameful confirmation of a Supreme Court Justice by a male Senate, consider the equivocation in the following passage and decide for yourself if Rush's tongue is fused to his cheek:

> He could be considered a socialist in the noumenal sense of being for a society where human self-realization and liberation were a general outcome and not an outcome only for the most talented or driven or unscrupulous in any given generation, and their heirs. He

CELIA
A SLAVE



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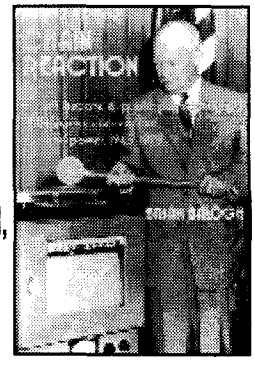

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wasn't going to bore me with all his specifications for the devices you had to put together to give you such a consummation devoutly to be wished. But also I mustn't be confused about him and unadulterated capitalism or think he thought anything but that the limited liability corporation was a virus that was devouring the world. Underneath everything in America he sometimes imagined there was a subliminal sound like an orange crate cracking when you stand on it, except that this sound never stopped. . . . We need socialism, correctly specified, he said, or rather we need the soul of it or its noumen. But then nervously he said When I say we I don't mean to be incorporating you into my construct in some subtle way, by the way. It's all right, I said: I'm not *not* a socialist, if that's any way to describe yourself politically. You could call me a nihilo-liberal. He laughed. I meant it, though.

And so, presumably, does Rush. □

Guys and Dolls

RICHARD LINGEMAN

DAMON RUNYON: A Life. *By Jimmy Breslin. Ticknor & Fields. 410 pp. $24.95.*

Damon Runyon's New York was a mythical patch of Manhattan real estate known as "Broadway," a fantasy world populated by the kind of people who define the word "Runyonesque"—sentimental gangsters, bighearted bookies, grifters, floozies, Apple Annies and assorted menacing wise guys. The denizens of this never-never land speak a distinctive patois that calls for verbs always to be in the present tense and eschews contractions. Thus:

> One morning along about four bells, I am standing in front of Mindy's restaurant on Broadway with a guy by the name of Regret, who has this name because it seems he wins a very large bet the year the Whitney filly, Regret, grabs the Kentucky Derby, and can never forget it, which is maybe because it is the only very large bet he ever wins in his life.

But in Runyon's imaginary garden there were real toads. Characters like Regret, Dave the Dude, Benny South Street and Nicely-Nicely Johnson were based on real gamblers and gangsters with whom Runyon socialized at places like Lindy's, Texas Guinan's, Billy LaHiff's and Manny Manishor's Furnace Club ("the Hottest Spot in Town"), a speakeasy that had steps made of glass blocks with imitation flames inside them.

Runyon's Broadway existed during the Roaring Twenties and the Dirty Thirties, and it's a long way from *Newsday* columnist Jimmy Breslin's New York. To him Broadway means the theater district, populated by decorous well-dressed tourists and suburbanites making a brief excursion to town to see *Cats* or *Les Miz*. Breslin writes mostly about blue-collar guys in Queens, blacks in Harlem, Hispanics in East Harlem and murderers and crooked politicians all over. Instead of nightclubs he hangs out in Irish bars. He used to write about fictional gangsters who might be called Runyonesque, such as Marvin the Torch, an arsonist by trade, but he's retired most of them for reasons that identify the difference between his Big Town and Runyon's: "The notion of lovable hoodlums in today's city, where the business of organized crime consists of drug peddling and virtually nothing else, is not discussable. A writer such as Damon Runyon would be busy on a rewrite desk today. Life is too complicated for the Runyon point of view."

Breslin wrote those words a few years ago; now he has written a biography of Runyon. What is he—following Runyon's adage "Get the money"? Sure, but Runyon was the Breslin of his day, and there is an affinity between them, despite the disparities between their times. They both relish disreputable folk and life's losers. With Runyon it was the criminal class created by Prohibition, which made its illegal gains from society's hypocrisy in passing laws against normal activities like drinking and gambling. With Breslin it's the hard-working slobs who are screwed by the Big Thieves with financial and political power.

Then too, Breslin says he was exposed to the legends about the raucous tabloid press of Runyon's day, and much of the material for the book he picked up the way Runyon did his stories—by hanging around and listening:

> I must have heard a thousand conversations about the man and his times from all parts of town. . . . I don't think that anybody working New York today has been in more places or heard more, or has so many street memories, and so when I tell you this story and put down what people say, the conversation

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> was told to me long before we met each other as reader and writer. . . . I have been around so many people, from so many places, standing in bars over the long hours that are the open seacocks that scuttle many lives, hearing so many tales and recounted conversations. . . .

In the absence of bibliography or notes, we'll have to take the provenance of the reported conversations on faith, but I suspect many of them should have a footnote saying, "additional dialogue by Jimmy Breslin." Judging from internal evidence, however, Breslin also did considerable research in the morgue of the *New York American*, preserved intact at the University of Texas, and either he or his legperson combed old city directories and newspapers to track Runyon from his boyhood in Colorado through his rise to journalistic stardom in New York and then a lucrative career peddling his Broadway fables to the slicks and Hollywood in the 1930s and early 1940s.

Runyon was born in Manhattan, Kansas, in 1880, the son of a printer who was a heavy drinker—but I repeat myself, as Mark Twain said, speaking of Congressmen in a different connection. The father, Alfred Lee Runyan, was a fast hand at the type tray when sober and even when drunk, and he also had some talent for literary expression, as Breslin demonstrates by quoting his letters about fighting Indians in the 1860s and 1870s. As self-made men in the literary line are wont to do, Damon liked to imply that he was a born writer by pathogenesis, but it was in the genes, Breslin says. Runyon's Dickensian childhood may have had something to do with his affection for renegades. After his mother died, he pretty much raised himself on the streets of Pueblo, Colorado. Sometimes Alfred brought home a whore Saturday night and pushed the boy off the bed they shared. But the old man also gave Damon the best possible legacy, an entree into journalism. At age 11 he published a Kiplingesque poem in his father's paper, and by age 12, Breslin says, he was working as a reporter. He showed a precocious talent for writing, whiskey and cigarettes.

After a time Runyon made his way to papers in Denver, taking his thirst along. He really wanted to be a poet and would sit at bars by the hour writing verse with a fierce concentration broken only by sips from a shot glass. But he couldn't handle the firewater, and after waking up in a hotel room screaming from the D.T.s he resolved to quit for good, and for the rest of his life he never took another drink. He compensated for that by chain-smoking and downing forty cups of coffee per day. Still, abstinence was one of the smartest career moves he ever made, given the high rate of booze-related self-destruction among the working press.

In 1911 he followed a journalist friend to New York and through him got a job with Hearst's *American* as a sportswriter. His stories about a Giants pitcher named Bugs Raymond, who kept his arm limber by hoisting schooners of beer, became popular. He covered sports through the 1920s, the so-called Golden Age, which Breslin spends too many pages debunking.

Runyon was a good sportswriter—a solid, hard-working pro—and I don't think Breslin quite gives him his due. That's partly because Breslin is more interested in reminding us of Runyon's ventures as a fight promoter (which meant he wrote about fights in which he

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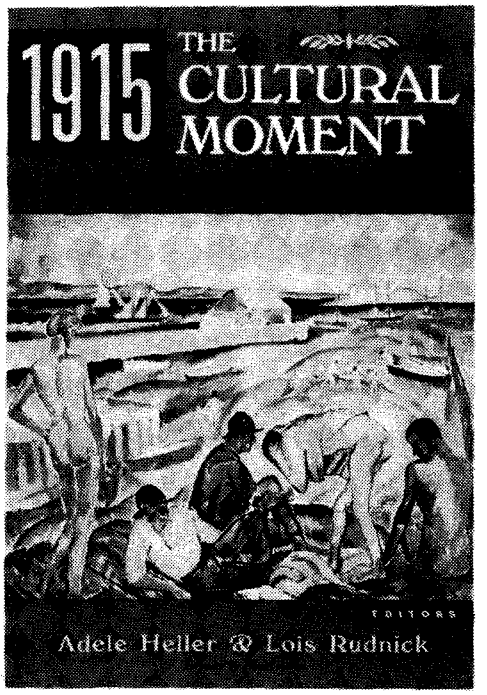

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had a financial interest) and his compulsive betting on the horses. Breslin does give us a taste of Runyon's reporting by quoting his description of Casey Stengel's inside-the-park homer for the Giants in the 1923 World Series:

> This is the way old "Casey" Stengel ran yesterday afternoon, running his home run home.
>
> This is the way old "Casey" Stengel ran running his home run home to a Giant victory by a score of 5-4 in the first game of the World Series of 1923.
>
> This is the way old "Casey" Stengel ran, running his home run home, when two were out in the ninth inning and the score was tied and the ball was still bouncing inside the Yankee yard.
>
> This is the way—
>
> His mouth wide open.
>
> His warped old legs bending beneath him at every stride.
>
> His arms flying back and forth like those of a man swimming with a crawl stroke.

As befitted the leading thoroughbred in the Hearst stables, Runyon did other reporting as well. He covered Pancho Villa, World War I, the Lindbergh trial and events of similar magnitude. He was behind one of the great investigative scoops of the twenties—the exposé of the New York love nest of Bishop James Cannon Jr., a mighty doer of the Lord's work and champion of Prohibition. This damaging revelation pleased wets and adulterers like Mayor Jimmy Walker, who piously proclaimed, "I say to you that the last thing this fair city of ours can tolerate is adultery by bishops."

Runyon also began writing about gangsters, who appeared in his column and then in short stories. His introduction to the underworld was provided by Owney Madden, boss of the Irish mob on the West Side and later brewer of the best Prohibition beer in New York. Madden, who had killed so many men that the chief of police said he "must own a cemetery," encouraged Runyon to write about characters who hung out at Madden's Winona Club on Tenth Avenue and 47th Street. One such personage was a 360-pound innocent known as Nicely Hogan, which Runyon, with his impeccable ear, changed to "Nicely-Nicely." Gangsters were flattered when he mentioned them, says Breslin; it gave them respectability.

After Madden, he met Frank Costello, Meyer Lansky, Dutch Schultz and, later, Bugsy Siegel. Such acquaintanceships provided grist for columns and stories, but sometimes Runyon's privileged access forced him to choose between being a reporter or a stool pigeon. Once he found himself holding an overcoat belonging to the fleeing George McManus, a small-time gambler who had just shot big-time mobster Arnold Rothstein. In the pockets of the coat were bullets identical to those used in killing Rothstein. Not wanting to be involved as a material witness, Runyon did what any respectable Broadway citizen would do: He made every effort to return the coat to its rightful owner before the police got it.

But he was never really friendly with gangsters or, for that matter, anyone else. As Breslin depicts him, he was an aloof man who stored his feelings in a large block of ice. This emotional numbness probably could be traced back to the lonely kid on the streets of Pueblo who "retreated inside himself, found a cold empty chamber with pale light, sat down in it and waited for the cheerfulness around him to pass." Even in his most personal stuff, his short stories, Runyon kept his innermost emotions under wraps. As Breslin notes, "A narrator hiding behind a false voice was the closest he

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would ever come to allowing his life to be seen and felt by others." The raffish world of genial lowlifes he created gave a lot of people a lot of pleasure and laughs, but Runyon was always the pro who went for the money. He took care to airbrush the violence and stupidity of the hoods who were its prototypes and to provide a sentimental or happy ending.

From Breslin's account, Runyon also built a wall between himself and the people closest to him. He left his wife, Ellen, at home to raise the kids, while he sat out the nights at Lindy's. The love of his life was a woman half his age named Patrice Gridier, whom he had met in Mexico covering Villa when she was still a child. After she made a lucky bet on a horse for him, he staked her to a convent education. Years later, she arrived in New York, looking very grown-up indeed. Runyon got her a job in the chorus at Texas Guinan's and a room at a hotel, eventually setting up housekeeping with her.

While Runyon was seeing Patrice, Ellen Runyon was coping with two fatherless children, who were eventually shunted off to boarding schools; she quietly drank herself to death. Shortly thereafter Runyon and Patrice were married, but in the early 1940s she discarded him for a younger man. By that time, Runyon was harboring the throat cancer that would kill him.

Breslin concludes that Runyon was the biggest consumer of the illusions he purveyed. After writing a story called "Madame La Gimp," he came to believe that Patrice was a Spanish countess, like the daughter in the story, and that she owned the tenth-largest diamond in the world, the Amati diamond. He convinced Patrice to believe all this too. Even when she started secretly lacing her Cokes with gin and stepping out on him with the giant boxer Primo Carnera, Runyon refused to admit it. He did, however, promote a bout between Carnera and an emerging young fighter named Joe Louis, who slaughtered the Italian as Patrice cringed in the stands.

After Runyon died in 1946, a small-time hood named Richie decided to steal the legendary Amati diamond. He barged in on Patrice, who was living near Miami Beach, slugged her and made off with the strongbox in which the gem supposedly reposed. He took it to Quiet Sal, Breslin writes ("a very good reverse locksmith in that he only wanted locks to open"), who opened the box. Inside "was a thin, beautifully formed layer of dust." So it was with Runyon's Broadway; he died in plenty of time to miss its turning to dust.

Breslin is precise about the date of the demise of Damon Runyon's Broadway: 1961. That's when the first shipment of John Deere 99 cotton pickers left Des Moines, headed for the South. Displaced from the land by mechanization, poor blacks streamed north and moved into the slums while the whites fled to the suburbs and grim urban realities displaced the gay illusions of an earlier day. Well, something like that; social history is not Breslin's game.

Damon Runyon: A Life reads like a string of Breslin columns, filled out with sometimes confusing asides and obvious hindsight. Still, when he's doing what he does best, telling stories, fashioning authentic dialogue, pricking the absurdity of cheap illusions, conveying the feel of the city, he's the best around. And, not incidentally, he is also very funny. If he's neglected to do a lot of the things biographers are supposed to do, he has done one thing very few of them can do, and that is to inhabit his subject and make him come alive on the pages like a character in a very good novel. □

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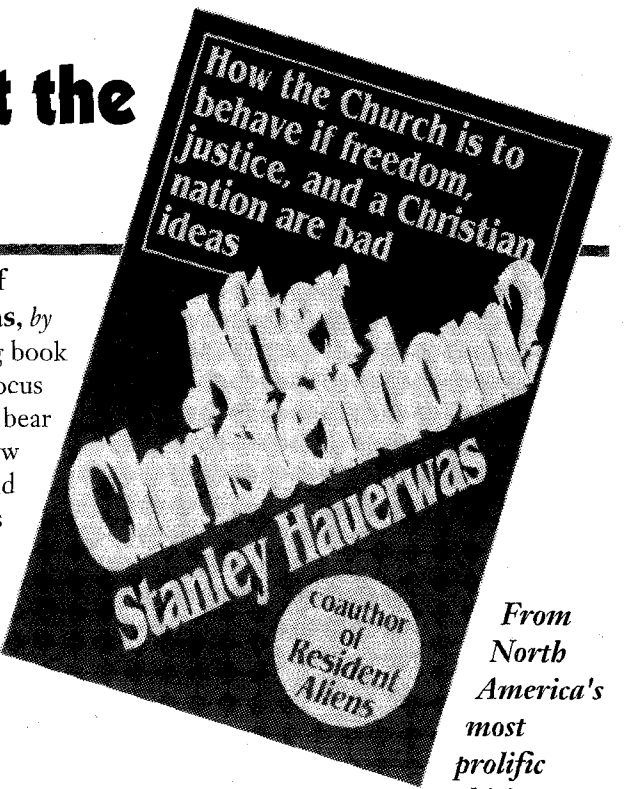
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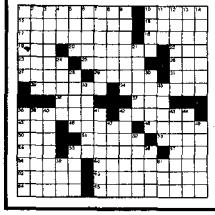

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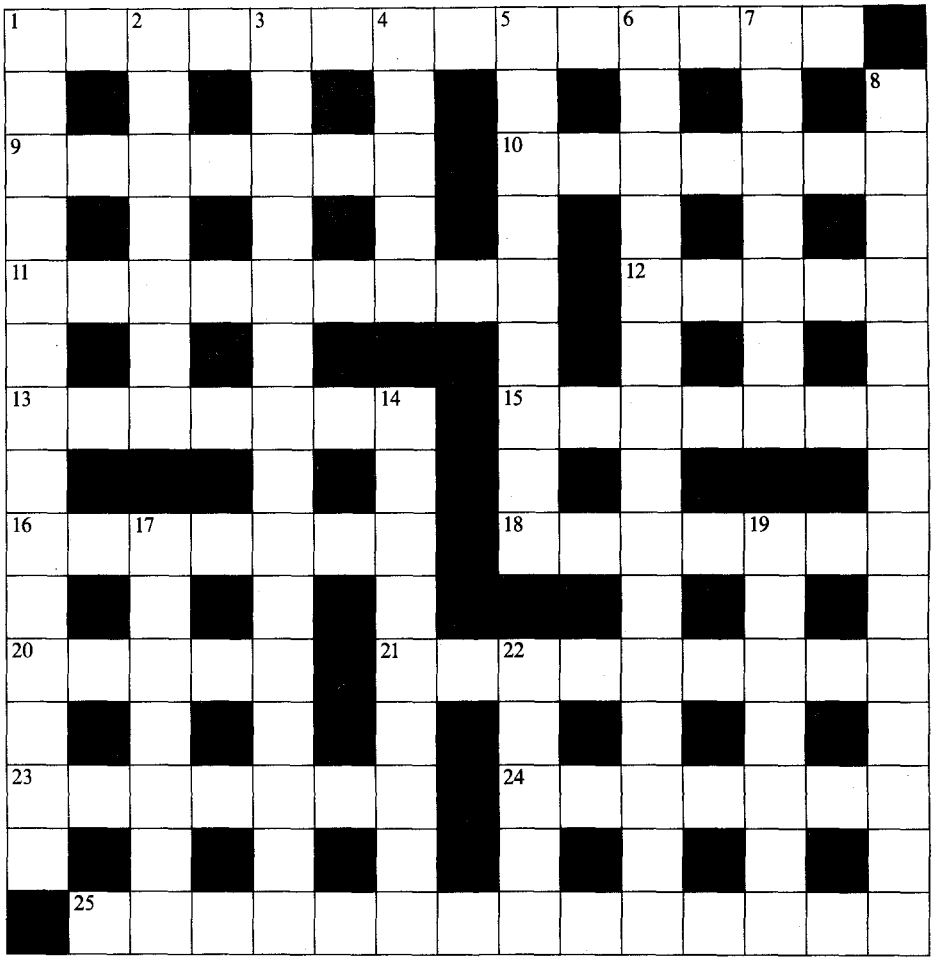

ACROSS

1 Head of the French Foreign Office, in short and the grass is cut a little short, being edible. (4,2,4,4)
9 She supposedly gives you whatever you deserve, but seems in trouble. (7)
10 The poor sot gets wealthy, but reputedly resorts to partial burial. (7)
11 What the bride might say some time afterwards has a point like other devoted admirers. (9)
12 Is it material for the Empire State and Mr. Chaney to make it? (5)
13 Give the right name? (7)
15 See, it's a sort of DC-10, see? (7)
16 Tell one of these, and part of the circle ends up belonging to the woman! (7)
18 What they used to do in the list a boy passes around, to get something to eat. (7)
20 A Queen of England's back with a purgative! (5)
21 Such people select things from various sources . . . (9)
23 . . . and look things over carefully. (You can see then, I'm a Xerox in reverse!) (7)
24 The state of memorial in the pacific. (7)
25 Not necessarily overseas liaisons more diplomatic adventures. (7,7)

DOWN

1 These must have proved quite a drain for the Romans. (Ann promises the solution.) (7,7)
2 The clock isn't running now? (4,3)
3 Phoning this family member might prove expensive. (7,8)
4 You and I find ourselves surrounded by what we pay the doctor or lawyer, but some make light of it. (5)
5 Old-time dates (presses on ahead of them) with Cromwell? (9)
6 Jump inside, Mr. Thumb proves he's boss! (Misbehave, though!) (3,4,8)
7 Armpits or leaf parts, indisposed with a chopper around. (7)
8 With a few coins left over, a person goes from side to side, as the reformer does. (6,4,4)
14 Lent just before it might get broken? (6,3)
17 Though munificent, a voucher shows it isn't worth very much money. (7)
19 In Africa, a journey Oliver doesn't finish? (7)
22 With Miss Turner around, I find it might be real creepy! (5)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

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